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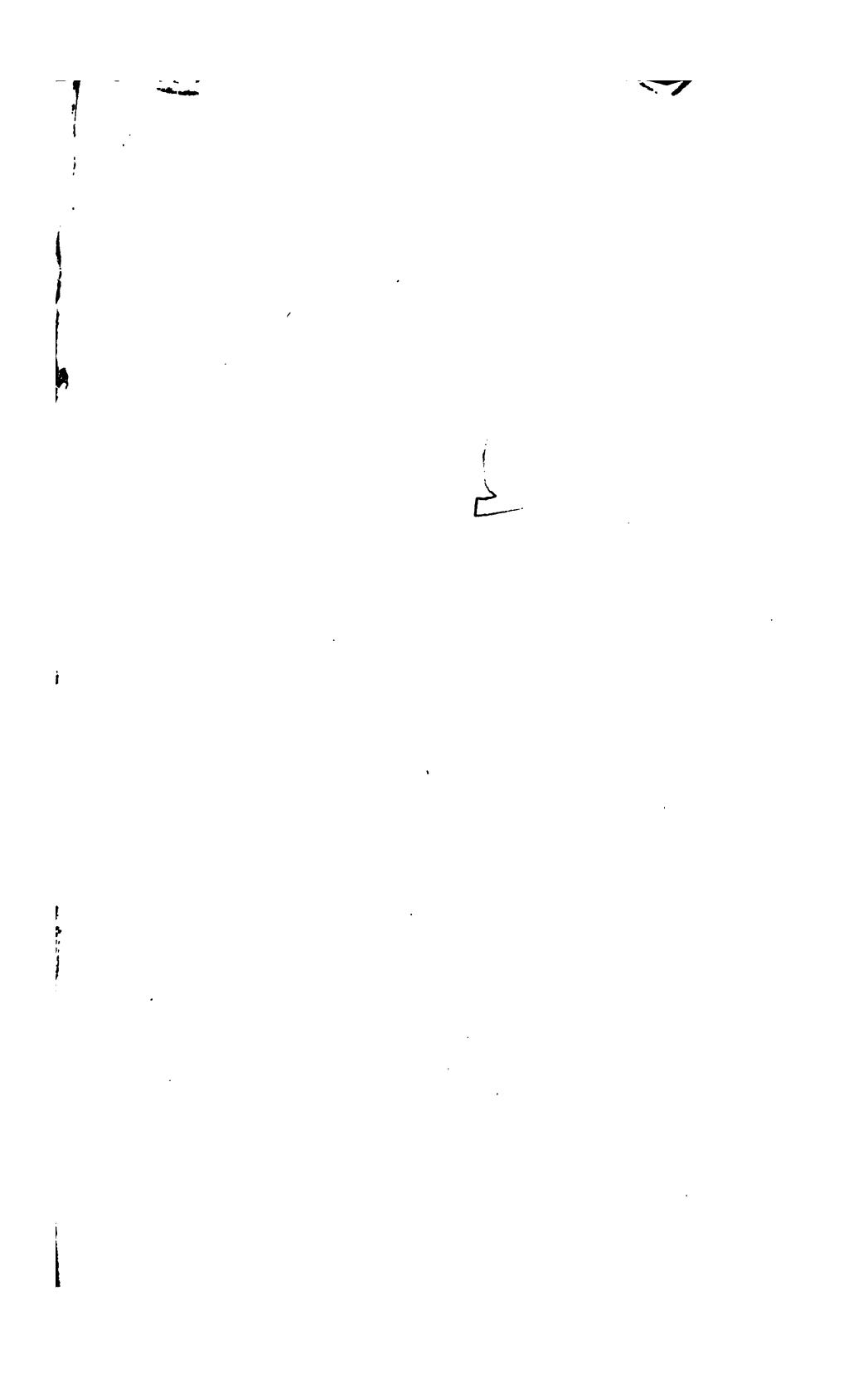
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THE THREE CLERKS.

A Novel.

BY ANTHONY TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF "BARCHESTER TOWERS," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE THREE CLERKS.

CHAPTER I.

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES.

ALL the English world knows, or knows of, that branch of the Civil Service which is popularly called the Weights and Measures. Every inhabitant of London, and every casual visitor there, has admired the handsome edifice which generally goes by that name, and which stands so conspicuously confronting the Treasury Chambers. It must be owned that we have but a slip-slop way of christening our public buildings. When a man tells us that he called on a friend at the Horse-Guards, or looked in at the Navy Pay, or dropped a ticket at the Woods and Forests, we put up with the accustomed sounds, though they are in themselves, perhaps, indefensible. The "Board of Commissioners for Regulating Weights and Measures," and the "Office

of the Board of Commissioners for Regulating Weights and Measures," are very long phrases, and as in the course of this tale frequent mention will be made of the public establishment in question, the reader's comfort will be best consulted by maintaining its popular though improper denomination.

It is generally admitted that the Weights and Measures is a well-conducted public office; indeed, to such a degree of efficiency has it been brought by its present very excellent secretary, the two very worthy assistant-secretaries, and especially by its late most respectable chief-clerk, that it may be said to stand quite alone as a high model for all other public offices whatever. It is exactly antipodistic of the Circumlocution Office, and as such is always referred to in the House of Commons by the gentleman representing the Government when any attack on the Civil Service, generally, is being made.

And when it is remembered how great are the interests intrusted to the care of this board, and of these secretaries and of that chief-clerk, it must be admitted that nothing short of superlative excellence ought to suffice the nation. All material intercourse between man and man must be regulated, either justly or unjustly, by weights and

measures ; and as we of all people depend most on such material intercourse, our weights and measures should to us be a source of never-ending concern. And then that question of the decimal coinage ! is it not in these days of paramount importance ? Are we not disgraced by the twelve pennies in our shilling, by the four farthings in our penny ? One of the worthy assistant-secretaries, the worthier probably of the two, has already grown pale beneath the weight of this question. But he has sworn within himself, with all the heroism of a Nelson, that he will either do or die. He will destroy the shilling or the shilling shall destroy him. In his more ardent moods he thinks that he hears the noise of battle booming round him, and talks to his wife of Westminster Abbey or a peerage. Then what statistical work of the present age has shown half the erudition contained in that essay lately published by the secretary on "The Market Price of Coined Metals" ? What other living man could have compiled that chronological table which is appended to it, showing the comparative value of the metallic currency for the last three hundred years ? Compile it indeed ! What other secretary or assistant-secretary, belonging to any

public office of the present day, could even read it and live? It completely silenced Mr. Muntz for a session, and even "The Times" was afraid to review it.

Such a state of official excellence has not, however, been obtained without its drawbacks, at any rate in the eyes of the unambitious tyros and unfledged noviciates of the establishment. It is a very fine thing to be pointed out by envying fathers as a promising clerk in the Weights and Measures, and to receive civil speeches from mamas with marriageable daughters. But a clerk in the Weights and Measures is soon made to understand that it is not for him to—

Sport with Amaryllis in the shade.

It behoves him that his life should be grave and his pursuits laborious, if he intends to live up to the tone of those around him. And as, sitting there at his early desk, his eyes already dim with figures, he sees a jaunty dandy saunter round the opposite corner to the Council Office at eleven o'clock, he cannot but yearn after the pleasures of idleness.

"Were it not better done, as others use?"

He says or sighs. But then comes Phœbus in the guise of the chief-clerk, and touches his trembling ears—

As he pronounces lastly on each deed,
Of so much fame, in Downing Street—expect the meed.
And so the high tone of the office is maintained.

Such is the character of the Weights and Measures at this present period of which we are now treating. The exoteric crowd of the Civil Service, that is the great body of clerks attached to other offices, regard their brethren of the Weights and Measures as prigs and pedants, and look on them much as a master's favourite is apt to be regarded by other boys at school. But this judgment is an unfair one. Prigs and pedants, and hypocrites too, there are among them, no doubt—but there are also among them many stirred by an honourable ambition to do well for their country and themselves, and to two such men the reader is now requested to permit himself to be introduced.

Henry Norman, the senior of the two, is the second son of a gentleman of small property in the north of England. He was educated at a public school, and thence sent to Oxford; but before he had finished his first year at Brazenose his father was obliged to withdraw him from it, finding himself unable to bear the expense of a university education for his two sons. His elder son at Cambridge was extravagant, and

as, at the critical moment when decision became necessary, a nomination in the Weights and Measures was placed at his disposal, old Mr. Norman committed the not uncommon injustice of preferring the interests of his elder but faulty son to those of the younger, with whom no fault had been found, and deprived his child of the chance of combining the glories and happiness of a double first, a fellow, a college tutor, and a don.

Whether Harry Norman gained or lost most by the change, we need not now consider, but at the age of nineteen he left Oxford and entered on his new duties. It must not, however, be supposed that this was a step which he took without difficulty and without pause. It is true that the grand modern scheme for competitive examinations had not as yet been composed. Had this been done, and had it been carried out, how awful must have been the cramming necessary to get a lad into the Weights and Measures! But, even as things were then, it was no easy matter for a young man to convince the chief-clerk that he had all the acquirements necessary for the high position to which he aspired.

Indeed, that chief-clerk was insatiable, and generally succeeded in making every candidate conceive the very lowest opinion of himself and

his own capacities before the examination was over. Some of course were sent away at once with ignominy, as evidently incapable. Many retired in the middle of it with a conviction that they must seek their fortunes at the bar, or in medical pursuits, or some other comparatively easy walk of life. Others were rejected on the fifth or sixth day as being deficient in conic sections, or ignorant of the exact principles of hydraulic pressure. And even those who were retained were so retained, as it were, by an act of grace. The Weights and Measures was, and indeed is, like heaven—no man can deserve it. No candidate can claim as his right to be admitted to the fruition of the appointment which has been given to him. Young Henry Norman, however, was found, at the close of his examination, to be the least undeserving of the young men then under notice, and was duly installed in his clerkship.

It need hardly be explained, that to secure so high a level of information as that required at the Weights and Measures, a scale of salaries equally exalted has been found necessary. Young men consequently enter at £100 a-year. We are speaking, of course, of that more respectable branch of the establishment called the Secre-

tary's Department. At none other of our public offices do men commence with more than £90, except, of course, at those in which political confidence is required. Political confidence is indeed as expensive as hydraulic pressure, though generally found to be less difficult of attainment.

Henry Norman, therefore, entered on his labours under good auspices, having £10 per annum more for the business and pleasures of life in London than most of his young brethren of the Civil Service. Whether this would have sufficed of itself to enable him to live up to that tone of society to which he had been accustomed cannot now be surmised, as very shortly after his appointment an aunt died from whom he inherited some £150 or £200 a-year. He was, therefore, placed above all want, and soon became a shining light even in that bright gallery of spiritualised stars which formed the corps of clerks in the Secretary's office at the Weights and Measures.

Young Norman was a good-looking lad when he entered the public service, and in a few years he grew up to be a handsome man. He was tall and thin and dark, muscular in his proportions and athletic in his habits. From the date of his first enjoyment of his aunt's legacy he had a

wherry on the Thames, and was soon known as a man whom it was hard for an amateur to beat. He had a racket in a racket-court at St. John's Wood Road, and as soon as fortune and merit increased his salary by another £100 a-year, he usually had a nag for the season. This, however, was not attained till he was able to count five years' service in the Weights and Measures. He was, as a boy, somewhat shy and reserved in his manners, and as he became older he did not shake off the fault. He showed it, however, rather among men than with women, and, indeed, in spite of his love of exercise, he preferred the society of ladies to any of the bachelor gaieties of his unmarried acquaintance. He was, nevertheless, frank and confident in those he trusted, and true in his friendships, though, considering his age, too slow in making a friend. Such was Henry Norman at the time at which our tale begins. What were the faults in his character it must be the business of the tale to show.

The other young clerk in this office to whom we alluded is Alaric Tudor. He is a year older than Henry Norman, though he began his official career a year later, and therefore at the age of twenty-one. How it happened that he contrived to pass the scrutinizing instinct and deep powers

of examination possessed by the chief-clerk, was a great wonder to his friends, though apparently none at all to himself. He took the whole proceeding very easily; while another youth along side of him at the time, who for a year had been reading up for his promised nomination, was so awestruck by the severity of the proceedings as to lose his powers of memory and forget the very essence of the differential calculus.

Of hydraulic pressure and the differential calculus young Tudor knew nothing, and pretended to know nothing. He told the chief-clerk that he was utterly ignorant of all such matters, that his only acquirements were a tolerably correct knowledge of English, French and German, with a smattering of Latin and Greek, and such an intimacy with the ordinary rules of arithmetic and with the first books of Euclid as he had been able to pick up while acting as a tutor, rather than a scholar, in a small German university.

The chief-clerk raised his eyebrows and said he feared it would not do. A clerk, however, was wanting. It was very clear that the young gentleman who had only showed that he had forgotten his conic sections could not be supposed to have passed. The austerity of the last few years had deterred more young men from coming

forward than the extra £10 had induced to do so. One unfortunate had, on the failure of all his hopes, thrown himself into the Thames from the neighbouring boat-stairs ; and though he had been hooked out uninjured by the man who always attends there with two wooden legs, the effect on his parents' minds had been distressing. Shortly after this occurrence the chief-clerk had been invited to attend the Board, and the Chairman of the Commissioners, who, on the occasion, was of course prompted by the secretary, recommended Mr. Hardlines to be a *leetle* more lenient. In doing so the quantity of butter which he poured over Mr. Hardlines' head and shoulders with the view of alleviating the misery which such a communication would be sure to inflict, was very great. But, nevertheless, Mr. Hardlines came out from the Board a crestfallen and unhappy man. "The service," he said, "would go to the dogs, and might do for anything he cared, and he did not mind how soon. If the Board chose to make the Weights and Measures an hospital for idiots, it might do so. He had done what little lay in his power to make the office respectable ; and now, because mamas complained when their cubs of sons were not allowed to come in there and rob the public and destroy the office books,

he was to be thwarted and reprimanded ! He had been," he said, " eight-and-twenty years in office, and was still in his prime—but he should," he thought, " take advantage of the advice of his medical friends, and retire. He would never remain there to see the Weights and Measures become an hospital for incurables!"

It was thus that Mr. Hardlines, the chief-clerk, expressed himself. He did not, however, send in a medical certificate, nor apply for a pension ; and the first apparent effect of the little lecture which he had received from the Chairman, was the admission into the service of Alaric Tudor. Mr. Hardlines was soon forced to admit that the appointment was not a bad one, as before his second year was over, young Tudor had produced a very smart paper on the merits—or demerits—of the strike bushel.

Alaric Tudor when he entered the office was by no means so handsome a youth as Harry Norman ; but yet there was that in his face which was more expressive and perhaps more attractive. He was a much slighter man, though equally tall. He could boast no adventitious capillary graces, whereas young Norman had a pair of black curling whiskers, which almost surrounded his face, and had been the delight and

wonder of the maid servants in his mother's house, when he returned home for his first official holiday. Tudor wore no whiskers, and his light brown hair was usually cut so short as to give him something of the appearance of a clean puritan.

But in manners he was no puritan ; nor yet in his mode of life. He was fond of society, and at an early period of his age strove hard to shine in it. He was ambitious ; and lived with the steady aim of making the most of such advantages as fate and fortune had put in his way. Tudor was perhaps not superior to Norman in point of intellect ; but he was infinitely his superior in having early acquired a knowledge how best to use such intellect as he had.

His education had been very miscellaneous, and disturbed by many causes, but yet not ineffective or deficient. His father had been an officer in a cavalry regiment, with a fair fortune, which he had nearly squandered in early life. He had taken Alaric when little more than an infant, and a daughter, his only other child, to reside in Brussels. Mrs. Tudor was then dead, and the remainder of the household had consisted of a French governess, a *bonne*, and a man-cook. Here Alaric remained till he had perfectly acquired

the French pronunciation, and very nearly as perfectly forgotten the English. He was then sent to a private school in England, where he remained till he was sixteen, returning home to Brussels but once during those years, when he was invited to be present at his sister's marriage with a Belgian banker. At the age of sixteen he lost his father, who on dying, did not leave behind him enough of the world's wealth to pay for his own burial. His half-pay of course died with him, and young Tudor was literally destitute.

His brother-in-law, the banker, paid for his half-year's schooling in England, and then removed him to a German academy, at which it was bargained that he should teach English without remuneration, and learn German without expense. Whether he taught much English may be doubtful, but he did learn German thoroughly; and in that, as in most other transactions of his early life, certainly got the best of the bargain which had been made for him.

At the age of twenty he was taken to the Brussels bank as a clerk; but here he soon gave visible signs of disliking the drudgery which was exacted from him. Not that he disliked banking. He would gladly have been a partner with ever so small a share, and would have

trusted to himself to increase his stake. But there is a limit to the good-nature of brothers-in-law, even in Belgium ; and Alaric was quite aware that no such good-luck as this could befall him, at any rate until he had gone through many years of servile labour. His sister also, though sisterly enough in her disposition to him, did not quite like having a brother employed as a clerk in her husband's office. They therefore put their heads together, and as the Tudors had good family connections in England, a nomination in the Weights and Measures was procured.

The nomination was procured ; but when it was ascertained how very short a way this went towards the attainment of the desired object, and how much more difficult it was to obtain Mr. Hardlines' approval than the Board's favour, young Tudor's friends despaired, and recommended him to abandon the idea, as, should he throw himself into the Thames, he might perhaps fall beyond the reach of the waterman's hook. Alaric himself, however, had no such fears. He could not bring himself to conceive that he could fail in being fit for a clerkship in a public office, and the result of his examination proved at any rate that he had been right to try.

The close of his first year's life in London, found him living in lodgings with Henry Nor-

man. At that time Norman's income was nearly three times as good as his own. To say that Tudor selected his companion because of his income would be to ascribe unjustly to him vile motives and a mean instinct. He had not done so. The two young men had been thrown together by circumstances. They worked at the same desk, liked each other's society, and each being alone in the world, thereby not unnaturally came together. But it may probably be said that had Norman been as poor as Tudor, Tudor might probably have shrunk from rowing in the same boat with him.

As it was they lived together and were fast allies; not the less so that they did not agree as to many of their avocations. Tudor, at his friend's solicitation, had occasionally attempted to pull an oar from Searle's step to Battersea Bridge. But his failure in this line was so complete, and he had to encounter so much of Norman's raillery, which was endurable, and of his instruction, which was unendurable, that he very soon gave up the pursuit. He was not more successful with a racket; and keeping a horse was of course out of the question.

In other matters, however, they adopted similar feelings and similar pursuits. Tudor, when he arrived in London, regarded himself as some-

what of a free-thinker in matters of religion ; but he was of that age when men's opinions are easily changed without loss of self-respect. At twenty-one religious convictions are seldom the effect of judgment. They have either been produced by habit and education, or by fancy. Norman had been brought up in the new tenets of High Church observances. He became a follower of, or rather an attendant on Mr. Bennet ; he had a cross on his prayer-book, and fed somewhat differently on Fridays and fast days than at other times. He talked of, and perhaps had read, the Tracts ; he professed an immeasurable disgust for Mr. Gorham, and in the course of time subscribed his £10, with the view of thwarting that clerical reprobate—as he called him—Mr. Ditcher.

And there is something in the combined decency and earnestness of these Oxford doctrines which is peculiarly alluring to a young man ambitious of avoiding the slang and low-lived pleasures which have been, and even are yet, too common among youths who should be gentlemen. A man aspiring to be a Puseyite may generally be known, not only by the propriety of his garb and as it were by his Sunday observances, but equally so by his general tastes and habits, and by pleasures which he can acknowledge before

his father, talk of before his sisters, and share with his clerical friends. If only, when he has ordered his waistcoat, chosen his prayer-book, and selected his becoming pastimes, he would not think that all were done !

Thus Henry Norman was respectable and Puseyistical, and Alaric Tudor after a while found it suitable to become so also.

Then they had another bond of union in certain common friends whom they much loved, and with whom they much associated. At least these friends soon became common to them. The acquaintance originally belonged to Norman, and he had first cemented his friendship with Tudor by introducing him at the house of Mrs. Woodward. Since he had done so the one young man was there nearly as much as the other.

Who and what the Woodwards were shall be told in a subsequent chapter. As they have to play as important a part in the tale about to be told as our two friends of the Weights and Measures, it would not be becoming to introduce them at the end of this.

As regards Alaric Tudor it need only be further said, by way of preface of him as of Harry Norman, that the faults of his character must be made to declare themselves in the course of our narrative.

CHAPTER II.

THE INTERNAL NAVIGATION.

THE London world, visitors as well as residents, are well acquainted also with Somerset House ; and it is moreover tolerably well known that Somerset House is a nest of public offices, which are held to be of less fashionable repute than those situated in the neighbourhood of Downing Street, but are not so decidedly plebeian as the Custom House, Excise, and Post Office.

But there is one branch of the Civil Service located in Somerset House, which has little else to redeem it from the lowest depths of official vulgarity than the ambiguous respectability of its material position. This is the office of the Commissioners of Internal Navigation. The duties to be performed have reference to the preservation of canal banks, the tolls to be levied at locks, and disputes with the Admiralty as to points connected with tidal rivers. The rooms are dull and dark, and saturated with the fog which rises from the river, and their only orna-

ment is here and there some dusty model of an improved barge. Bargees not unfrequently scuffle with hob-nailed shoes through the passages, and go in and out, leaving behind them a smell of tobacco to which the denizens of the place are not unaccustomed.

Indeed the whole office is apparently infected with a leaven of bargedom. Not a few of the men are employed from time to time in the somewhat lethargic work of inspecting the banks and towing-paths of the canals which intersect the country. This they generally do seated on a load of hay, or perhaps of bricks, in one of those long, ugly, shapeless boats, which are to be seen congregating in the neighbourhood of Brentford. So seated, they are carried along at the rate of a mile and a half an hour, and usually wile away the time in gentle converse with the man at the rudder, or in silent abstraction over a pipe.

But the dulness of such life as this is fully atoned for by the excitement of that which follows it in London. The men of the Internal Navigation are known to be fast, nay, almost furious, in their pace of living—not that they are extravagant in any great degree, a fault which their scale of salaries very generally for-

bids ; but they are, one and all, addicted to Coal Holes and Cider Cellars ; they dive at midnight hours into Shades, and know all the back parlours of all the public-houses in the neighbourhood of the Strand. Here they leave messages for one another, and call the girl at the bar by her Christian name. They are a set of men endowed with tallow complexions, and they wear loud clothing, and spend more money in gin-and-water than in gloves.

The establishment is not unusually denominated the “Infernal Navigation,” and the gentlemen employed are not altogether displeased at having it so called. The “Infernal Navvies,” indeed, rather glory in the name. The navvies of Somerset-house are known all over London, and there are those who believe that their business has some connection with the rivers or rail-roads of that bourne from whence no traveller returns. Looking, however, from their office windows into the Thames, one might be tempted to imagine that the infernal navigation with which they are connected is not situated so far distant from the place of their labours.

The spirit who guards the entrance into this elysium is by no means so difficult to deal with

as Mr. Hardlines. And it were well that it was so some few years since for young Charley Tudor, a cousin of our friend Alaric ; for Charley Tudor could never have passed muster at the Weights and Measures. Charles Tudor, the third of the three clerks alluded to in our title-page, is the son of a clergyman who has a moderate living on the Welsh border, in Shropshire. Had he known to what sort of work he was sending his son, he might probably have hesitated before he accepted for him a situation in the Internal Navigation Office. He was, however, too happy in getting it to make many inquiries as to its nature. We none of us like to look a gift-horse in the mouth. Old Mr. Tudor knew that a clerkship in the Civil Service meant, or should mean, a respectable maintenance for life, and having many young Tudors to maintain himself, he was only too glad to find one of them provided for.

Charley Tudor was some few years younger than his cousin Alaric when he came up to town, and Alaric had at that time some three or four years' experience of London life. The examination at the Internal Navigation was certainly not to be so much dreaded as that at the Weights and Measures ; but still there was an examination ; and Charley, who had not been the most

diligent of school-boys, approached it with great dread after a preparatory evening passed with the assistance of his cousin and Mr. Norman.

Exactly at ten in the morning he walked into the lobby of his future workshop, and found no one yet there but two aged seedy messengers. He was shown into a waiting-room and there he remained for a couple of hours, during which every clerk in the establishment came to have a look at him. At last he was ushered into the Secretary's room.

"Ah!" said the Secretary, "your name is Tudor, isn't it?"

Charley confessed to the fact.

"Yes," said the Secretary, "I have heard about you from Sir Gilbert de Salop." Now, Sir Gilbert de Salop was the great family friend of this branch of the Tudors. But Charley, finding that no remark suggested itself to him at this moment concerning Sir Gilbert, merely said, "Yes, sir."

"And you wish to serve the Queen?" said the Secretary.

Charley, not quite knowing whether this was a joke or not, said that he did.

"Quite right—it is a very fair ambition," continued the great official functionary—"quite right—but, mind you, Mr. Tudor, if you come to

us you must come to work. I hope you like hard work ; you should do so, if you intend to remain with us."

Charley said that he thought he did rather like hard work. Hereupon a senior clerk standing by, though a man not given to much laughter, smiled slightly, probably in pity at the unceasing labour to which the youth was about to devote himself.

"The Internal Navigation requires great steadiness, good natural abilities, considerable education, and—and—and no end of application. Come, Mr. Tudor, let us see what you can do." And so saying Mr. Oldeschole, the secretary, motioned him to sit down at an office table opposite to himself.

Charley did as he was bid, and took from the hands of his future master an old, much-worn quill pen, with which the great man had been signing minutes.

"Now," said the great man, "just copy the few first sentences of that leading article—either one will do ;" and he pushed over to him a huge newspaper.

To tell the truth, Charley did not know what a leading article was, and so he sat abashed, staring at the paper.

"Why don't you write?" asked the Secretary.

"Where shall I begin, Sir?" stammered poor Charley, looking piteously into the examiner's face.

"God bless my soul! there; either of those leading articles," and leaning over the table the Secretary pointed to a particular spot.

Hereupon Charley began his task in a large, ugly, round hand, neither that of a man nor of a boy, and set himself to copy the contents of the paper. "The name of Pacifico stinks in the nostril of the British public. It is well known to all the world how sincerely we admire the versatility of Lord Palmerston's genius; how cordially we sympathise with his patriotic energies. But the admiration which even a Palmerston inspires must have a bound, and our sympathy may be called on too far. When we find ourselves asked to pay——." By this time Charley had half covered the half-sheet of foolscap which had been put before him, and here at the word "pay" he unfortunately suffered a large blot of ink to fall on the paper.

"That won't do, Mr. Tudor, that won't do—come, let us look;" and stretching over again, the Secretary took up the copy.

"Oh dear! oh dear! this is very bad; versa-

tility with an 'i!'—sympathy with an 'i!'—sympathise with an 'i!' Why, Mr. Tudor, you must be very fond of 'i's' down in Shropshire."

Charley looked sheepish, but of course said nothing.

"And I never saw a viler hand in my life. Oh dear, oh dear, I must send you back to Sir Gilbert. Look here, Snape, this will never do—never do for the Internal Navigation, will it?"

Snape, the attendant senior clerk, said, as indeed he could not help saying, that the writing was very bad.

"I never saw worse in my life," said the Secretary. "And now, Mr. Tudor, what do you know of arithmetic?"

Charley said that he thought he knew arithmetic pretty well;—"at least some of it," he modestly added.

"Some of it!" said the Secretary, slightly laughing. "Well, I'll tell you what — this won't do at all;" and he took the unfortunate manuscript between his thumb and forefinger. "You had better go home and endeavour to write something a little better than this. Mind, if it is not very much better it won't do. And look here; take care that you do it

yourself. If you bring me the writing of any one else, I shall be sure to detect you. I have not any more time now; as to arithmetic we'll examine you in 'some of it' to-morrow."

So Charley with a faint heart went back to his cousin's lodgings, and waited till the two friends had arrived from the Weights and Measures. The men there made a point of working up to five o'clock, as is the case with all model officials, and it was therefore late before he could get himself properly set to work. But when they did arrive preparations for calligraphy were made on a great scale; a volume of Gibbon was taken down, new quill pens, large and small, and steel pens by various makers were procured; cream-laid paper was provided, and ruled lines were put beneath it. And when this was done, Charley was especially cautioned to copy the spelling as well as the wording.

He worked thus for an hour before dinner, and then for three hours in the evening, and produced a very legible copy of half a chapter of the "Decline and Fall."

"I didn't think they examined at all at the Navigation," said Norman.

"Well, I believe it's quite a new thing;" said Alaric Tudor. "The schoolmaster must be

abroad with a vengeance, if he has got as far as that."

And then they carefully examined Charley's work, crossed his t's, dotted his i's, saw that his spelling was right, and went to bed.

Again, punctually at ten o'clock, Charley presented himself at the Internal Navigation; and again saw the two seedy old messengers warming themselves at the lobby fire. On this occasion he was kept three hours in the waiting-room, and some of the younger clerks ventured to come and speak to him. At length Mr. Snape appeared, and desired the acolyte to follow him. Charley, supposing that he was again going to the awful Secretary, did so with a palpitating heart. But he was led in another direction into a large room, carrying his manuscript neatly rolled in his hand. Here Mr. Snape introduced him to five other occupants of the chamber; he, Mr. Snape himself, having a separate desk there, being, in official parlance, the head of the room. Charley was told to take a seat at a desk, and did so, still thinking that the dread hour of his examination was soon to come. His examination, however, was begun and over. No one ever asked for his caligraphic manuscript, and as to his arithmetic, it may be presumed that his assur-

ance that he knew “some of it,” was deemed to be adequate evidence of sufficient capacity. And in this manner, Charley Tudor became one of the Infernal Navvies.

He was a gay-hearted, thoughtless, rollicking young lad, when he came up to town ; and it may therefore be imagined that he easily fell into the peculiar ways and habits of the office. A short bargee’s pilot coat, and a pipe of tobacco, were soon familiar to him ; and he had not been six months in town before he had his house-of-call in a cross lane running between Essex Street and Norfolk Street. “Mary, my dear, a screw of bird’s-eye !” came quite habitually to his lips ; and before his first year was out, he had volunteered a song at the Buckingham Shades.

The assurance made to him on his first visit to the office by Mr. Secretary Oldeschole; that the Internal Navigation was a place of herculean labours, had long before this time become matter to him of delightful ridicule. He had found himself to be one of six young men, who habitually spent about five hours a day together in the same room, and whose chief employment was to render the life of the wretched Mr. Snape as unendurable as possible. There were copies to be written, and entries to be made, and books to

be indexed. But these things were generally done by some extra hand, as to the necessity of whose attendance for such purpose Mr. Snape was forced to certify. But poor Snape knew that he had no alternative. He ruled six unruly young navvies! There was not one of them who did not well know how to make him tremble in his shoes.

Poor Mr. Snape had selected for his own peculiar walk in life, a character for evangelical piety. Whether he was a hypocrite—as all the navvies averred—or a man sincere as far as one so weak could accomplish sincerity, it is hardly necessary for us to inquire. He was not by nature an ill-natured man, but he had become by education harsh to those below him, and timid and cringing with those above. In the former category must by no means be included the six young men who were nominally under his guidance. They were all but acknowledged by him as his superiors. Ignorant as they were, they could hardly be more so than he. Useless as they were, they did as much for the public service as he did. He sometimes complained of them; but it was only when their misconduct had been so loud as to make it no longer possible that he should not do so.

Mr. Snape being thus by character and predilection a religious man, and having on various occasions in olden days professed much horror at having his ears wounded by conversation which was either immoral or profane, it had of course become the habitual practice of the navvies to give continual utterance to every description of ribaldry and blasphemy for his especial edification. Doubtless it may be concluded from the habits of the men, that even without such provocation, their talk would have exceeded the yea, yea, and nay, nay, to which young men should confine themselves. But they especially concerted schemes of blasphemy and dialogues of iniquity for Mr. Snape's particular advantage; and continued daily this disinterested amusement, till at last an idea got abroad among them that Mr. Snape liked it. Then they changed their tactics and canted through their noses in the manner which they imagined to be peculiar to methodist preachers. So on the whole, Mr. Snape had an uneasy life of it at the Internal Navigation.

Into all these malpractices Charley Tudor plunged headlong. And how should it have been otherwise? How can any youth of nineteen or twenty do other than consort himself with the daily companions of his usual avoca-

tions? Once and again, in one case among ten thousand, a lad may be found formed of such stuff, that he receives neither the good nor the bad impulses of those around him. But such a one is a *lapsus naturæ*. He has been born without the proper attributes of youth, or at any rate, brought up so as to have got rid of them.

Such a one, at any rate, Charley Tudor was not. He was a little shocked at first by the language he heard; but that feeling soon wore off. His kind heart, also, in the first month of his noviciate sympathised with the daily miseries of Mr. Snape; but he also soon learnt to believe that Mr. Snape was a counterfeit, and after the first half year could torture him with as much gusto as any of his brethren. Alas! no evil tendency communicates itself among young men more quickly than cruelty. Those infernal navvies were very cruel to Mr. Snape.

And yet young Tudor was a lad of a kindly heart, of a free, honest, open disposition, deficient in no proportion of mind necessary to make an estimable man. But he was easily malleable, and he took at once the full impression of the stamp to which he was subjected. Had he gone into the Weights and Measures, an hypothesis which of course presumes a total prostration of

the intellects and energy of Mr. Hardlines, he would have worked without a groan from ten till five, and have become as good a model as the best of them. As it was, he can be hardly said to have worked at all, soon became *facile princeps* in the list of habitual idlers, and was usually threatened once a quarter with dismissal, even from that abode of idleness in which the very nature of true work was unknown.

Some tidings of Charley's doings in London, and non-doings at the Internal Navigation, of course found their way to the Shropshire Parsonage. His dissipation was not of a very costly kind; but £90 per annum will hardly suffice to afford an ample allowance of gin-and-water and bird's-eye tobacco, over and above the other wants of a man's life. Bills arrived there requiring payment; and worse than this, letters also came through Sir Gilbert de Salop from Mr. Oldeschole, the Secretary, saying that young Tudor was disgracing the office, and lowering the high character of the Internal Navigation; and that he must be removed, unless he could be induced to alter his line of life, &c.

Urgent austere letters came from the father, and fond heart-rending appeals from the mother. Charley's heart was rent. It was at any rate

a sign in him that he was not past hope of grace, that he never laughed at these monitions, that he never showed such letters to his companions, never quizzed his "governor's" lectures, or made merry over the grief of his mother. But if it be hard for a young man to keep in the right path when he has not as yet strayed out of it, how much harder is it to return to it when he has long since lost the track! It was well for the father to write austere letters, well for the mother to make tender appeals, but Charley could not rid himself of his companions, nor of his debts, nor yet even of his habits. He could not get up in the morning and say that he would at once be as his cousin Alaric, or as his cousin's friend, Mr. Norman. It is not by our virtues or our vices that we are judged, even by those who know us best; but by such credit for virtues or for vices as we may have acquired. Now young Tudor's credit for virtue was very slight, and he did not know how to extend it.

At last papa and mama Tudor came up to town to make one last effort to save their son; and also to save, on his behalf, the valuable official appointment which he held. He had now been three years in his office, and his salary

had risen to £110 per annum. £110 per annum was worth saving if it could be saved. The plan adopted by Mrs. Tudor was that of beseeching their cousin Alaric to take Charley under his especial wing.

When Charley first arrived in town, the fact of Alaric and Norman living together had given the former a good excuse for not offering to share his lodgings with his cousin. Alaric, with the advantage in age of three or four years (at that period of life the advantage lies in that direction), with his acquired experience of London life, and also with all the wondrous éclat of the Weights and Measures shining round him, had perhaps been a little too unwilling to take by the hand a rustic cousin who was about to enter life under the questionable auspices of the Internal Navigation. He had helped Charley to transcribe the chapter of Gibbon, and had, it must be owned, lent him from time to time a few odd pounds in his direst necessities. But their course in life had hitherto been apart. Of Norman, Charley had seen less even than of his cousin.

And now it became a difficult question with Alarie how he was to anwer the direct appeal made to him by Mrs. Tudor:—"Pray, pray let him live with you, if it be only for a year,

Alaric," the mother had said, with the tears running down her cheeks. " You are so good, so discreet, so clever—you can save him." Alaric promised, or was ready to promise, anything else, but hesitated as to the joint lodgings. " How could he manage it," said he, " living, as he was, with another man? He feared that Mr. Norman would not accede to such an arrangement. As for himself, he would do anything but leave his friend Norman." To tell the truth, Alaric thought much, perhaps too much, of the respectability of those with whom he consorted. He had already begun to indulge ambitious schemes, already had ideas stretching even beyond the limits of the Weights and Measures, and fully intended to make the very most of himself.

Mrs. Tudor, in her deep grief, then betook herself to Mr. Norman, though with that gentleman she had not even the slightest acquaintance. With a sinking heart, with a consciousness of her unreasonableness, but with the eloquence of maternal sorrow, she made her request. Mr. Norman heard her out with all the calm propriety of the Weights and Measures, begged to have a day to consider, and then acceded to the request.

"I think we ought to do it," said he to Alaric. The mother's tears had hardly touched his heart, but his sense of duty had prevailed. Alaric, of course, could now make no further objection, and thus Charley the Navvie became domesticated with his cousin Alaric and Harry Norman.

The first great question to be settled, and it is a very great question with a young man, was that of latch key or no latch key. Mrs. Richards the landlady, when she made ready the third bedroom for the young gentleman, would, as was her wont in such matters, have put a latch key on the toilet table as a matter of course, had she not had some little conversation with Mama Tudor regarding her son. Mama Tudor had implored and coaxed, and probably bribed Mrs. Richards to do something more than "take her son in and do for him;" and Mrs. Richards, as her first compliance with these requests, had kept the latch key in her own pocket. So matters went on for a week; but when Mrs. Richards found that her maid-servant was never woken by Mr. Charley's raps after midnight, and that she herself was obliged to descend in her dressing-gown, she changed her mind, declared to herself that it was useless to attempt to keep a grown gentleman

in leading-strings, and put the key on the table on the second Monday morning.

As none of the three men ever dined at home, Alaric and Norman having clubs which they frequented, and Charley eating his dinner at some neighbouring dining house, it may be imagined that this change of residence did our poor navvy but little good. It had, however, a salutary effect on him, at any rate at first. He became shamed into a quieter and perhaps cleaner mode of dressing himself; he constrained himself to sit down to breakfast with his monitors at half-past eight, and was at any rate so far regardful of Mrs. Richards as not to smoke in his bedroom, and to come home sober enough to walk up stairs without assistance every night for the first month.

But perhaps the most salutary effect made by this change on young Tudor was this, that he was taken by his cousin one Sunday to the Woodwards. Poor Charley had had but small opportunity of learning what are the pleasures of decent society. He had gone headlong among the infernal navvies too quickly to allow of that slow and gradual formation of decent alliances which is all in all to a young man entering life. A boy is turned loose into London, and desired

to choose the good and eschew the bad. Boy as he is, he might probably do so if the opportunity came in his way. But no such chance is afforded him. To eschew the bad is certainly possible for him ; but as to the good, he must wait till he be chosen. This it is, that is too much for him. He cannot live without society, and so he falls.

Society, an ample allowance of society, this is the first requisite which a mother should seek for in sending her son to live alone in London ; balls, routs, picnics, parties ; women, pretty, well-dressed, witty, easy-mannered ; good pictures, elegant drawing rooms, well got-up books, Majolica and Dresden china—these are the truest guards to protect a youth from dissipation and immorality.

“ These are the books, the arts, the academes
That shew, contain, and nourish all the world,”

—if only a youth could have them at his disposal. Some of these things, though by no means all, Charley Tudor encountered at the Woodwards.

CHAPTER III.

THE WOODWARDS.

IT is very difficult now-a-days to say where the suburbs of London come to an end, and where the country begins. The railways, instead of enabling Londoners to live in the country, have turned the country into a city. London will soon assume the shape of a great star fish. The old town, extending from Poplar to Hammersmith, will be the nucleus, and the various railway lines will be the projecting rays.

There are still, however, some few nooks within reach of the metropolis which have not been be-villaed and be-terraced out of all look of rural charm, and the little village of Hampton, with its old-fashioned country inn, and its bright, quiet, grassy river, is one of them in spite of the triple metropolitan water-works on the one side, and the close vicinity on the other of Hampton Court, that well-loved resort of cockneydom.

It was here that the Woodwards lived. Just on the outskirts of the village, on the side of it furthest from town, they inhabited, not a villa, but a small old-fashioned brick house, abutting

on to the road, but looking from its front windows on to a lawn and garden, which stretched down to the river.

The grounds were not extensive, being included, house and all, in an area of an acre and a half: but the most had been made of it; it sloped prettily to the river, and was absolutely secluded from the road. Thus Surbiton Cottage, as it was called, though it had no pretension to the grandeur of a country house, was a desirable residence for a moderate family with a limited income.

Mrs. Woodward's family, for there was no Mr. Woodward in the case, consisted of herself and three daughters. There was afterwards added to this an old gentleman, an uncle of Mrs. Woodward's, but he had not arrived at the time at which we would wish first to introduce our readers to Hampton.

Mrs. Woodward was the widow of a clergyman who had held a living in London, and had resided there. He had, however, died when two of his children were very young, and while the third was still a baby. From that time Mrs. Woodward had lived at the cottage at Hampton, and had there maintained a good repute, paying her way from month to month as widows with

limited incomes should do, and devoting herself to the amusements and education of her daughters.

It was not, probably, from any want of opportunity to cast them aside, that Mrs. Woodward had remained true to her weeds; for at the time of her husband's death, she was a young and a very pretty woman; and an income of £400 a year, though moderate enough for all the wants of a gentleman's family, would no doubt have added sufficiently to her charms to have procured her a second alliance, had she been so minded.

Twelve years, however, had now elapsed since Mr. Woodward had been gathered to his fathers, and the neighbouring world of Hampton, who had all of them declared over and over again that the young widow would certainly marry again, were now becoming as unanimous in their expressed opinion that the old widow knew the value of her money too well to risk it in the keeping of the best he that ever wore boots.

At the date at which our story commences, she was a comely little woman, past forty years of age, somewhat below the middle height, rather *embonpoint*, as widows of forty should be, with pretty fat feet, and pretty fat hands; wearing just a *soupçon* of a widow's cap on her head, with her hair, now slightly gray, parted in front, and

brushed very smoothly, but not too carefully, in *bandeaux* over her forehead.

She was a quick little body, full of good-humour, slightly given to repartee, and perhaps rather too impatient of a fool. But though averse to a fool, she could sympathise with folly. A great poet has said that women are all rakes at heart; and there was something of the rake at heart about Mrs. Woodward. She never could be got to express adequate horror at fast young men, and was apt to have her own sly little joke at women who prided themselves on being punctilious. She could, perhaps, the more safely indulge in this, as scandal had never even whispered a word against herself.

With her daughters she lived on terms almost of equality. The two elder were now grown up; that is they were respectively eighteen and seventeen years old. They were devotedly attached to their mother, looked on her as the only perfect woman in existence, and would willingly do nothing that could vex her; but they perhaps were not quite so systematically obedient to her as children should be to their only surviving parent. Mrs. Woodward, however, found nothing amiss, and no one else therefore could well have a right to complain.

They were both pretty—but Gertrude, the elder, was by far the more strikingly so. They were, nevertheless, much alike; they both had rich brown hair, which they, like their mother, wore simply parted over the forehead. They were both somewhat taller than her, and were nearly of a height. But in appearance as in disposition Gertrude carried by far the greater air of command. She was the handsomer of the two, and the cleverer. She could write French and nearly speak it, while her sister could only read it. She could play difficult pieces from sight which it took her sister a morning's pains to practise. She could fill in and finish a drawing, while her sister was still struggling, and struggling in vain, with the first principles of the art.

But there was a softness about Linda, for such was the name of the second Miss Woodward, which in the eyes of many men made up both for the superior beauty and superior talent of Gertrude. Gertrude was, perhaps, hardly so soft, as so young a girl should be. In her had been magnified that spirit of gentle raillery which made so attractive a part of her mother's character. She enjoyed and emulated her mother's quick sharp sayings, but she hardly did so with

her mother's grace, and sometimes attempted it with much more than her mother's severity. She also detested fools ; but in promulgating her opinion on this subject, she was too apt to declare who the fools were whom she disliked.

It may be thought that under such circumstances there could be but little confidence between the sisters ; but nevertheless, in their early days, they lived together as sisters should do. Gertrude, when she spoke of fools, never intended to include Linda in the number, and Linda appreciated too truly, and admired too thoroughly, her sister's beauty and talent to be jealous of either.

Of the youngest girl, Katie, it is not necessary at present to say much. At this time she was but thirteen years of age, and was a happy, pretty romping child. She gave fair promise to be at any rate equal to her sisters in beauty, and in mind was quick and intelligent. Her great taste was for boating, and the romance of her life consisted in laying out ideal pleasure-grounds, and building ideal castles in a little reedy island or ait which lay out in the Thames, a few perches from the drawing-room windows.

Such was the family of the Woodwards. Harry Norman's father and Mr. Woodward had been

first cousins, and hence it had been quite natural that when Norman came up to reside in London he should be made welcome to Surbiton Cottage. He had so been made welcome, and had thus got into a habit of spending his Saturday evenings and Sundays at the home of his relatives. In summer he could row up in his own wherry, and land himself and carpet-bag direct on the Woodwards' lawn, and in the winter he came down by the Hampton Court 5 p.m. train—and in each case he returned on the Monday morning. Thus, as regards that portion of his time which was most his own, he may be said almost to have lived at Surbiton Cottage, and if on any Sunday he omitted to make his appearance, the omission was ascribed by the ladies of Hampton in some half-serious sort of joke to metropolitan allurements and temptations which he ought to have withstood.

When Tudor and Norman came to live together, it was natural enough that Tudor also should be taken down to Surbiton Cottage. Norman could not leave him on every Saturday without telling him much of his friends whom he went to visit, and he could hardly say much of them without offering to introduce his companion to them. Tudor accordingly went there, and it

soon came to pass that he also very frequently spent his Sundays at Hampton.

It must be remembered that at this time, the time that is of Norman and Tudor's first entrance on their London life, the girls at Surbiton Cottage were mere girls—that is, little more than children; they had not, as it were, got their wings so as to be able to fly alone when the provocation to do so might come; they were, in short, Gertrude and Linda Woodward, and not the Miss Woodwards: their drawers came down below their frocks, instead of their frocks below their drawers; and in lieu of studying the French language, as is done by grown-up ladies, they did French lessons, as is the case with ladies who are not grown-up. Under these circumstances there was no embarrassment as to what the young people should call each other, and they soon became very intimate as Harry and Alaric, Gertrude and Linda.

It is not, however, to be conceived that Alaric Tudor at once took the same footing in the house as Norman. This was far from being the case. In the first place he never slept there, seeing that there was no bed for him; and the most confidential intercourse in the household took place as they sat cosy over the last embers of the

drawing-room fire, chatting about everything and nothing, as girls always can do, after Tudor had gone away to his bed at the Inn, on the opposite side of the way. And then Tudor did not come on every Saturday, and at first did not do so without express invitation ; and although the girls soon habituated themselves to the familiarity of their new friend's Christian name, it was some time before Mrs. Woodward did so.

Two—three years soon flew by, and Linda and Gertrude became the Miss Woodwards ; their frocks were prolonged, their drawers curtailed, and the lessons abandoned. But still Alaric Tudor and Harry Norman came to Hampton not less frequently than of yore, and the world resident on that portion of the left bank of the Thames found out that Harry Norman and Gertrude Woodward were to be man and wife, and that Alaric Tudor and Linda Woodward were to go through the same ceremony. They found this out or said that they had done so. But as usual, the world was wrong ; at least in part, for at the time of which we are speaking no word of love-making had passed, at any rate, between the last-named couple.

And what was Mrs. Woodward about all this time ? Was she match-making or match-marrying,

or was she negligently omitting the duties of a mother on so important an occasion? She was certainly neither match-making nor match-marrying; but it was from no negligence that she was thus quiescent. She knew, or thought she knew, that the two young men were fit to be husbands to her daughters, and she felt that if the wish for such an alliance should spring up between either pair, there was no reason why she should interfere to prevent it. But she felt also that she should not interfere to bring any such matter to pass. These young people had by chance been thrown together. Should there be love-passages among them, as it was natural to suppose there might be, it would be well. Should there be none such, it would be well also. She thoroughly trusted her own children, and did not distrust her friends; and so as regards Mrs. Woodward the matter was allowed to rest.

We cannot say that on this matter we quite approve of her conduct, though we cannot but admire the feeling which engendered it. Her daughters were very young; though they had made such positive advances as have been above described towards the discretion of womanhood, they were of the age when they would have been regarded as mere boys had they belonged to the

other sex. The assertion made by Clara Van Arteveld, that women “grow upon the sunny side of the wall,” is doubtless true; but young ladies, gifted as they are with such advantages, may perhaps be thought to require some counsel, some advice, in those first tender years in which they so often have to make or mar their fortunes.

Not that Mrs. Woodward gave them no advice; not but that she advised them well and often—but she did so, perhaps, too much as an equal, too little as a parent,

But, be that as it may—and I trust my readers will not be inclined so early in our story to lean heavily on Mrs. Woodward, whom I at once declare to be my own chief favourite in the tale—but, be that as it may, it so occurred that Gertrude, before she was nineteen, had listened to vows of love from Harry Norman, which she neither rejected nor repudiated; and that Linda had, before she was eighteen, perhaps unfortunately, taught herself to think it probable that she might have to listen to vows of love from Alaric Tudor.

There had been no concealment between the young men as to their feelings. Norman had told his friend scores of times that it was the first wish of his heart to marry Gertrude Woodward;

and had told him, moreover, what were his grounds for hope, and what his reasons for despair.

"She is as proud as a queen," he had once said as he was rowing from Hampton to Searle's Wharf, and lay on his oars as the falling tide carried his boat softly past the green banks of Richmond,—"she is as proud as a queen, and yet as timid as a fawn. She lets me tell her that I love her, but she will not say a word to me in reply; as for touching her in the way of a caress, I should as soon think of putting my arm round a goddess."

"And why not put your arms round a goddess?" said Alaric, who was perhaps a little bolder than his friend, and a little less romantic. To this Harry answered nothing, but, laying his back to his work, swept on past the gardens of Kew, and shot among the wooden dangers of Putney Bridge.

"I wish you could bring yourself to make up to Linda," said he, resting again from his labours; "that would make the matter so much easier."

"Bring myself!" said Alaric; "what you mean is, that you wish I could bring Linda to consent to be made up to."

"I don't think you would have much diffi-

culty," said Harry, finding it much easier to answer for Linda than for her sister; "but perhaps you don't admire her?"

"I think her by far the prettier of the two," said Alaric.

"That's nonsense," said Harry, getting rather red in the face, and feeling rather angry.

"Indeed I do; and so I am convinced would most men. You need not murder me, man. You want me to make up to Linda, and surely it will be better that I should admire my own wife than yours."

"Oh! you may admire whom you like; but to say that she is prettier than Gertrude—why, you know it is nonsense."

"Very well, my dear fellow; then to oblige you, I'll fall in love with Gertrude."

"I know you won't do that," said Harry, "for you are not so very fond of each other; but, joking apart, I do so wish you would make up to Linda."

"Well, I will when *my* aunt leaves *me* £200 a year."

There was no answering this; so the two men changed the conversation as they walked up together from the boat wharf, to the office of the Weights and Measures.

It was just at this time that fortune and old Mr. Tudor of the Shropshire Parsonage, brought Charley Tudor to reside with our two heroes. For the first month, or six weeks, Charley was ruthlessly left by his companions to get through his Sundays as best he could. It is to be hoped that he spent them in divine worship; but it may, we fear, be surmised with more probability, that he paid his devotions at the shrine of some very inferior public-house deity in the neighbourhood of Somerset House. As a matter of course, both Norman and Tudor spoke much of their new companion to the ladies at Surbiton Cottage, and as by degrees they reported somewhat favourably of his improved morals, Mrs. Woodward, with a woman's true kindness, begged that he might be brought down to Hampton.

"I am afraid you will find him very rough," said his cousin Alaric.

"At any rate you will not find him a fool," said Norman, who was always the more charitable of the two.

"Thank God for that!" said Mrs. Woodward, "and if he will come next Saturday, let him by all means do so. Pray give my compliments to him, and tell him how glad I shall be to see him."

And thus was this wild wolf to be led into the sheep-cote ; this infernal navvy to be introduced among the angels of Surbiton Cottage. Mrs. Woodward thought that she had a taste for reclaiming reprobates, and was determined to try her hand on Charley Tudor.

Charley went, and his début was perfectly successful. We have hitherto only looked on the worst side of his character ; but bad as his character was, it had a better side. He was good-natured in the extreme, kind-hearted, and affectionate ; and, though too apt to be noisy and even boisterous when much encouraged, was not without a certain innate genuine modesty, which the knowledge of his own iniquities had rather increased than blunted ; and, as Norman had said of him, he was no fool. His education had not been good, and he had done nothing by subsequent reading to make up for this deficiency ; but he was well endowed with mother wit, and owed none of his deficiencies to nature's churlishness.

He came, and was well received. The girls thought he would surely get drunk before he left the table, and Mrs. Woodward feared the austere precision of her parlour-maid might be offended by some unworthy familiarity ; but no accident of

either kind seemed to occur. He came to the tea-table perfectly sober, and, as far as Mrs. Woodward could tell, was unaware of the presence of the parlour-maiden. Mrs. Woodward had been told that he could sing, and after tea invited him to do so. They were quite astonished at the richness of his voice, his natural good taste, and the excellent choice of his songs. He sang to them the "Brave Old Oak," "Maxwelton Braes," and "The Fine Old English Gentleman," and at last delighted the hearts of all of them, and Mrs. Woodward in particular, by singing at her special request, "The Roast Beef of Old England" in a manner that she declared she never could forget. Mrs. Woodward was one of those who agreed with a famous divine in thinking that there was no good reason why the devil should keep to himself all the best tunes, or even all the best songs.

On the Sunday morning, Charley went to church, just like a Christian. Now Mrs. Woodward certainly had expected that he would have spent those two hours in smoking and attacking the parlour-maid. He went to church, however, and seemed in no whit astray there; stood up when others stood up, and sat down when others sat down. After all, the infernal navvies, bad as

they doubtless were, knew something of the recognized manners of civilized life.

Thus Charley Tudor ingratiated himself at Surbiton Cottage, and when he left, received a kind intimation from its mistress that she would be glad to see him again. No day was fixed, and so Charley could not accompany his cousin and Harry Tudor on the next Saturday; but it was not long before he got another direct invitation, and so he also became intimate at Hampton. There could be no danger of any one falling in love with him, for Katie was still a child.

Things stood thus at Surbiton Cottage when Mrs. Woodward received a proposition from a relative of her own, which surprised them all not a little. This was from a certain Captain Cuttwater, who was a maternal uncle to Mrs. Woodward, and consisted of nothing less than an offer to come and live with them for the remaining term of his natural life. Now Mrs. Woodward's girls had seen very little of their grand uncle, and what little they had seen had only taught them to laugh at him. When his name was mentioned in the family conclave, he was always made the subject of some little feminine ioke, and Mrs. Woodward, though she always took her uncle's part, did so in a manner that

made them feel that he was fair game for their quizzing.

When the proposal was first enunciated to the girls, they one and all, for Katie was one of the council, suggested that it should be declined with many thanks.

"He'll take us all for midshipmen," said Linda, "and stop our rations, and mast-head us whenever we displease him."

"I am sure he is a cross old hunk, though mama says he's not," said Katie, with all the impudence of spoilt fourteen.

"He'll interfere with every one of our pursuits," said Gertrude, more thoughtfully, "and be sure to quarrel with the young men."

But Mrs. Woodward, though she had consulted her daughters, had arguments of her own in favour of Captain Cuttwater's proposition, which she had not yet made known to them. Good-humoured and happy as she always was, she had her cares in the world. Her income was only £400 a year; and that, now that the Income Tax had settled down on it, was barely sufficient for her modest wants. A moiety of this died with her, and the remainder would be but a poor support for her three daughters, if at the time of her death it should so chance that she

should leave them in want of support. She had always regarded Captain Cuttwater as a probable source of future aid. He was childless and unmarried, and had not, as far as she was aware, another relative in the world. It would, therefore, under any circumstances, be bad policy to offend him. But the letter in which he had made his offer had been of a very peculiar kind. He had begun by saying that he was to be turned out of his present berth by a d—— Whig Government, on account of his age, he being as young a man as ever he had been; that it behoved him to look out for a place of residence, in which he might live, and, if it should so please God, die also. He then said that he expected to pay £200 a year for his board and lodging, which he thought might as well go to his niece as to some shark, who would probably starve him. He also said, that, poor as he was and always had been, he had contrived to scrape together a few hundred pounds; that he was well aware that if he lived among strangers, he should be done out of every shilling of it; but that if his niece would receive him, he hoped to be able to keep it together for the benefit of his grand-nieces, &c.

Now Mrs. Woodward knew her uncle to be an honest-minded man; she knew also, that, in

spite of his protestation as to being a very poor man, he had saved money enough to make him of some consequence wherever he went; and she therefore conceived that she could not with prudence send him to seek a home among chance strangers. She explained as much of this to the girls as she thought proper, and ended the matter by making them understand that Captain Cuttwater was to be received.

On the Saturday after this the three scions of the Civil Service were all at Surbiton Cottage, and it will show how far Charley had then made good his ground, to state that the coming of the captain was debated in his presence.

"And when is the great man to be here?" said Norman.

"At once, I believe," said Mrs. Woodward; "that is, perhaps before this end of the week, and certainly before the end of next."

"And what is he like?" said Alaric.

"Why, he has a tail hanging down behind, like a cat or a dog," said Katie.

"Hold your tongue, Miss," said Gertrude. "As he is to come he must be treated with respect; but it is a great bore. To me it will destroy all the pleasures of life."

"Nonsense, Gertrude," said Mrs. Woodward;

"it is almost wicked of you to say so. Destroy all the pleasure of life to have an old gentleman live in the same house with you!—you ought to be more moderate, my dear, in what you say."

"That's all very well, mama," said Gertrude, "but you know you don't like him yourself."

"But is it true that Captain Cuttwater wears a pigtail?" asked Norman.

"I don't care what he wears," said Gertrude; "he may wear three if he likes."

"Oh! I wish he would," said Katie, laughing; "that would be so delicious. Oh, Linda, fancy Captain Cuttwater with three pig's-tails!"

"I am sorry to disappoint you, Katie," said Mrs. Woodward, "but your uncle does not wear even one; he once did, but he cut it off long since."

"I am so sorry," said Katie.

"I suppose he'll want to dine early, and go to bed early?" said Linda.

"His going to bed early would be a great blessing," said Gertrude, mindful of their midnight conclaves on Saturdays and Sundays.

"But his getting up early won't be a blessing at all," said Linda, who had a weakness on that subject.

"Talking of bed, Harry, you'll have the worst

of it," said Katie, "for the captain is to have your room."

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Woodward, sighing gently, "we shall no longer have a bed for you, Harry; that *is* the worst of it."

Harry of course assured her that if that was the worst of it there was nothing very bad in it. He could have a bed at the inn as well as Alaric and Charley. The amount of that evil would only be half-a-crown a night.

And thus the advent of Captain Cuttwater was discussed.

CHAPTER IV.

CAPTAIN CUTTWATER.

CAPTAIN CUTTWATER had not seen much service afloat ; that is, he had not been personally concerned in many of those sea-engagements which in and about the time of Nelson gave so great a halo of glory to the British Lion ; nor had it even been permitted to him to take a prominent part in such minor affairs as have since occurred ; he had not the opportunity of distinguishing himself either at the battle of Navarino or the bombarding of Acre ; and, unfortunately for his ambition, the period of his retirement came before that great Baltic campaign, in which, had he been there, he would doubtless have distinguished himself as did so many others. His earliest years were spent in cruising among the West Indies ; he then came home and spent some considerable portion of his life in idleness—if that time can be said to have been idly spent which he devoted to torturing the Admiralty with applications, remonstrances, and appeals. Then he was rated as third lieutenant on the books of

some worm-eaten old man-of-war at Portsmouth, and gave up his time to looking after the stowage of anchors, and counting fathoms of rope. At last he was again sent afloat as senior lieutenant in a ten-gun brig, and cruised for some time off the coast of Africa, hunting for slavers; and returning after a while from this enterprising employment, he received a sort of amphibious appointment at Devonport. What his duties were here, the author, being in all points a landsman, is unable to describe. Those who were inclined to ridicule Captain Cuttwater declared that the most important of them consisted in seeing that the midshipmen in and about the dockyard washed their faces, and put on clean linen not less often than three times a week. According to his own account, he had many things of a higher nature to attend to; and, indeed, hardly a ship sank or swam in Hamoaze except by his special permission, for a space of twenty years, if his own view of his own career may be accepted as correct.

He had once declared to certain naval acquaintances, over his third glass of grog, that he regarded it as his birthright to be an Admiral; but at the age of seventy-two he had not yet acquired his birthright, and the probability of his

ever attaining it was becoming very small indeed. He was still bothering Lords and Secretaries of the Admiralty for further promotion, when he was astounded by being informed by the port-Admiral that he was to be made happy by half-pay and a pension. The Admiral, in communicating the intelligence, had pretended to think that he was giving the Captain information which could not be otherwise than grateful to him, but he was not the less aware that the old man would be furious at being so treated. What, pension him ! put him on half-pay—shelf him for life, while he was still anxiously expecting that promotion, that call to higher duties which had so long been his due, and which, now that his powers were matured, could hardly be longer denied to him ! And after all that he had done for his country—his ungrateful, thankless, ignorant country, was he thus to be treated ! Was he to be turned adrift without any mark of honour, any special guerdon, any sign of his Sovereign's favour to testify as to his faithful servitude of sixty years' devotion ? He, who had regarded it as his merest right to be an Admiral, and had long indulged the hope of being greeted in the streets of Devonport as Sir Bartholomew Cuttwater, K.C.B., was he to be thus

thrown aside in his prime, with no other acknowledgment than the bare income to which he was entitled !

It is hardly too much to say, that no old officers who have lacked the means to distinguish themselves, retire from either of our military services, free from the bitter disappointment and sour feelings of neglected worth, which Captain Cuttwater felt so keenly. A clergyman, or a doctor, or a lawyer, feels himself no whit disgraced if he reaches the end of his worldly labours without special note or honour. But to a soldier or a sailor, such indifference to his merit is wormwood. It is the bane of the profession. Nine men out of ten who go into it must live discontented, and die disappointed.

Captain Cuttwater had no idea that he was an old man. He had lived for so many years among men of his own stamp, who had grown gray and bald, and ricketty, and weak alongside of him, that he had no opportunity of seeing that he was more gray or more ricketty than his neighbours. No children had become men and women at his feet; no new race had gone out into the world and fought their battles under his notice. One set of midshipmen had succeeded to another, but his old comrades in the news-rooms and lounging-

places at Devonport had remained the same ; and Captain Cuttwater had never learnt to think that he was not doing, and was not able to do good service for his country.

The very name of Captain Cuttwater was odious to every clerk at the Admiralty. He, like all naval officers, hated the Admiralty, and thought, that of all Englishmen, those five who had been selected to sit there in high places as joint lords were the most incapable. He pestered them with continued and almost continuous applications on subjects of all sorts. He was always asking for increased allowances, advanced rank, more assistance, less work, higher privileges, immunities which could not be granted, and advantages to which he had no claim. He never took answers, but made every request the subject of a prolonged correspondence ; till at last some energetic Assistant-Secretary declared that it should no longer be borne, and Captain Cuttwater was dismissed with pension and half-pay. During his service he had contrived to save some four or five thousand pounds, and now he was about to retire with an assured income adequate to all his wants. The public who had the paying of Captain Cuttwater may, perhaps, think that he was amply remunerated for what he had done ; but

the captain himself entertained a very different opinion..

Such is the view which we are obliged to take of the professional side of Captain Cuttwater's character. But the professional side was by far the worst. Counting fathoms of rope and looking after unruly midshipmen on shore are not duties capable of bringing out in high relief the better traits of a man's character. Uncle Bat, as during the few last years of his life he was always called at Surbiton Cottage, was a gentleman and a man of honour, in spite of anything that might be said to the contrary at the Admiralty. He was a man with a soft heart, though the end of his nose was so large, so red and so pimply, and rough as was his usage to little midshipmen when his duty caused him to encounter them in a body, he had befriended many a one singly with kind words and an open hand. The young rogues would unmercifully quiz Old Nosey, for so Captain Cuttwater was generally called in Devonport, whenever they could safely do so ; but, nevertheless, in their young distresses they knew him for their friend, and were not slow to come to him.

In person Captain Cuttwater was a tall, heavy man, on whose iron constitution hogsheads of

Hollands and water seemed to have had no very powerful effect. Every year he had a fit of the gout which laid him up for three months. He was much given to profane oaths ; but knowing that manners required that he should refrain before ladies, and being unable to bring his tongue sufficiently under command to do so, he was in the habit of “craving the ladies’ pardon,” after every slip.

All that was really remarkable in Uncle Bat’s appearance was included in his nose. It had always been a generous, weighty, self-confident nose, inviting to itself more observation than any of its brother features demanded. But in latter years it had spread itself out in soft, porous, red excrescences, to such an extent as to make it really deserving of considerable attention. No stranger ever passed Captain Cuttwater in the streets of Devonport without asking who he was, or, at any rate, specially noticing him.

It must, of course, be admitted that a too strongly pronounced partiality for alcoholic drink had produced these defects in Captain Cuttwater’s feet and nasal organ ; and yet he was a most staunch friend of temperance. No man alive or dead had ever seen Captain Cuttwater the worse for liquor ; at least so boasted the Captain him-

self, and there were none, at any rate in Devonport, to give him the lie. Woe betide the midshipman whom he should see elated with too much wine ; and even to the common sailor who should be tipsy at the wrong time, he would show no mercy. Most eloquent were the discourses which he preached against drunkenness, and they always ended with a reference to his own sobriety. The truth was, that drink would hardly make Captain Cuttwater drunk. It left his brain untouched, but punished his feet and nose.

Mrs. Woodward had seen her uncle but once since she had become a widow. He had then come up to London to attack the Admiralty at close quarters, and had sojourned for three or four days at Surbiton Cottage. This was now some ten years since, and the girls had forgotten even what he was like. Great preparations were made for him ; though the summer had nearly commenced, a large fire was kept burning in his bedroom—his bed was newly hung with new curtains ; two feather-beds were piled on each other, and everything was done which five women could think desirable to relieve the ailings of suffering age. The fact, however, was, that Captain Cuttwater was accustomed to a small tent bedstead in

a room without a carpet, that he usually slept on a single mattress, and that he never had a fire in his bedroom, even in the depth of winter.

Travelling from Devonport to London is now an easy matter ; and Captain Cuttwater, old as he was, found himself able to get through to Hampton in one day. Mrs. Woodward went to meet him at Hampton Court in a fly, and conveyed him to his new home, together with a carpet-bag, a cocked hat, a sword, and a very small portmanteau. When she inquired after the remainder of his luggage, he asked her what more lumber she supposed he wanted. No more lumber at any rate made its appearance, then or afterwards ; and the fly proceeded with an easy load to Surbiton Cottage.

There was great anxiety on the part of the girls when the wheels were heard to stop at the front door. Gertrude kept her place steadily standing on the rug in the drawing-room ; Linda ran to the door and then back again ; but Katie bolted out and ensconced herself behind the parlour maid, who stood at the open door, looking eagerly forth to get the first view of Uncle Bat.

“ So here you are, Bessie, as snug as ever,” said the captain, as he let himself ponderously

down from the fly. Katie had never before heard her mother called Bessie, and had never seen anything approaching in sign or colour to such a nose, consequently she ran away frightened.

“That’s Gertrude—is it?” said the captain.

“Gertrude, uncle! Why Gertrude is a grown-up woman now. That’s Katie, whom you remember an infant.”

“God bless my soul!” said the captain, as though he thought that girls must grow twice quicker at Hampton than they did at Devonport or elsewhere, “God bless my soul!”

He was then ushered into the drawing-room, and introduced in form to his grand-nieces. “This is Gertrude, uncle, and this Linda; there is just enough difference for you to know them apart. And this Katie. Come here, Katie, and kiss your uncle.”

Katie came up, hesitated, looked horrified, but did manage to get her face somewhat close to the old man’s without touching the tremendous nose, and then having gone through this peril she retreated again behind the sofa.

“Well, bless my stars, Bessie, you don’t tell me those are your children?”

“Indeed, uncle, I believe they are. It’s a sad

tale for me to tell, is it not?" said the blooming mother with a laugh.

"Why, they'll be looking out for husbands next," said Uncle Bat.

"Oh! they're doing that already, every day," said Katie.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Uncle Bat; "I suppose so, I suppose so;—ha, ha, ha!"

Gertrude turned away to the window, disgusted and angry, and made up her mind to hate Uncle Bat for ever afterwards. Linda made a little attempt to smile, and felt somewhat glad in her heart that her uncle was a man who could indulge in a joke.

He was then taken up-stairs to his bed-room, and here he greatly frightened Katie, and much scandalized the parlour maid by declaring, immediately on his entering the room, that "it was d—— hot, d——ation hot; craving your pardon, ladies!"

"We thought, uncle, you'd like a fire," began Mrs. Woodward, "as ——"

"A fire in June, when I can hardly carry my coat on my back!"

"It's the last day of May now," said Katie timidly, from behind the bed curtains.

This, however, did not satisfy the captain, and orders were forthwith given that the fire should be taken away, the curtains stripped off, the feather beds removed, and everything reduced to pretty much the same state in which it had usually been left for Harry Norman's accommodation. So much for all the feminine care which had been thrown away upon the consideration of Uncle Bat's infirmities.

"God bless my soul!" said he, wiping his brow with a huge coloured handkerchief as big as a mainsail, "one night in such a furnace as that would have brought on the gout."

He had dined in town, and by the time that his chamber had been stripped of its appendages, he was nearly ready for bed. Before he did so, he was asked to take a glass of sherry.

"Ah! sherry," said he, taking up the bottle and putting it down again. "Sherry, ah! yes; very good wine, I am sure. You haven't a drop of rum in the house, have you?"

Mrs. Woodward declared with sorrow that she had not.

"Or Hollands?" said Uncle Bat. But the ladies of Surbiton Cottage were unsupplied also with Hollands.

"Gin?" suggested the captain, almost in despair.

Mrs. Woodward had no gin, but she could send out and get it; and the first evening of Captain Cuttwater's visit, saw Mrs. Woodward's own parlour-maid standing at the bar of the Green Dragon, while two gills of spirits were being measured out for her.

"Only for the respect she owed to Missus," as she afterwards declared, "she never would have so demeaned herself for all the captains in the Queen's battalions."

The captain, however, got his grog; and having enlarged somewhat vehemently while he drank it on the iniquities of those scoundrels at the Admiralty, took himself off to bed; and left his character and peculiarities to the tender mercies of his nieces.

The following day was Friday, and on the Saturday Norman and Tudor were to come down as a matter of course. During the long days, they usually made their appearance after dinner; but they had now been specially requested to appear in good orderly time, in honour of the captain. Their advent had been of course spoken of, and Mrs. Woodward had explained to

Uncle Bat that her cousin Harry usually spent his Sundays at Hampton, and that he usually also brought with him a friend of his, a Mr. Tudor. To all this, as a matter of course, Uncle Bat had as yet no objection to make.

The young men came, and were introduced with due ceremony. Surbiton Cottage, however, during dinner-time, was very unlike what it had been before, in the opinion of all the party there assembled. The girls felt themselves called upon, they hardly knew why, to be somewhat less intimate in their manner with the young men than they customarily were; and Harry and Alaric, with quick instinct, reciprocated the feeling. Mrs. Woodward, even, assumed involuntarily somewhat of a company air, and Uncle Bat, who sat at the bottom of the table, in the place usually assigned to Norman, was awkward in doing the honors of the house to guests who were in fact much more at home there than himself.

After dinner the young people strolled out into the garden, and Katie, as was her wont, insisted on Harry Norman rowing her over to her damp paradise in the middle of the river. He attempted, vainly, to induce Gertrude to accompany them. Gertrude was either coy with her lover, or indifferent; for very few were the

occasions on which she could be induced to gratify him with the rapture of a *tête-à-tête* encounter. So that, in fact, Harry Norman's Sunday visits were generally moments of expected bliss of which the full fruition was but seldom attained. So while Katie went off to the island, Alaric and the two girls sat under a spreading elm tree and watched the little boat as it shot across the water.

"And what do you think of Uncle Bat?" said Gertrude.

"Well, I am sure he's a good sort of fellow, and a very gallant officer, but—"

"But what?" said Linda.

"It's a thousand pities he should have ever been removed from Devonport, where I am sure he was both useful and ornamental."

Both the girls laughed cheerily, and as the sound came across the water to Norman's ears he repented himself of his good-nature to Katie, and determined that her sojourn in the favourite island should, on this occasion, be very short.

"But he is to pay mama a great deal of money," said Linda, "and his coming will be a great benefit to her in that way."

"There ought to be something to compensate for the bore," said Gertrude.

"We must only make the best of him," said Alaric. "For my part, I am rather fond of old gentlemen with long noses; but it seemed to me that he was not quite so fond of us. I thought he looked rather shy at Harry and me."

Both the girls protested against this, and declared that there could be nothing in it.

"Well, now I'll tell you what, Gertrude," said Alaric, "I am quite sure that he looks on me, especially, as an interloper; and yet I'll bet you a pair of gloves I am his favourite before a month is over."

"Oh, no; Linda is to be his favourite," said Gertrude.

"Indeed I am not," said Linda. "I liked him very well till he drank three huge glasses of gin-and-water last night, but I never can fancy him after that. You can't conceive, Alaric, what the drawing-room smelt like. I suppose he'll do the same every evening."

"Well, what can you expect?" said Gertrude, "if mama will have an old sailor to live with her, of course he'll drink grog."

While this was going on in the garden, Mrs. Woodward sat dutifully with her uncle while he sipped his obnoxious toddy, and answered his questions about their two friends.

"They were both in the Weights and Measures, by far the most respectable public office in London," as she told him, "and both doing extremely well there. They were, indeed, young men sure to distinguish themselves and get on in the world. Had this not been so, she might perhaps have hesitated to receive them so frequently, and on such intimate terms, at Surbiton Cottage." This she said in a half apologetic manner, and yet with a feeling of anger at herself that she should condescend to apologize to any one as to her own conduct in her own house.

"They are very nice young men, I'm sure," said Uncle Bat.

"Indeed they are," said Mrs. Woodward.

"And very civil to the young ladies?" said Uncle Bat.

"They've known them since they were children, uncle; and of course that makes them more intimate than young men generally are with young ladies;" and again Mrs. Woodward was angry with herself for making any excuses on the subject.

"Are they well off?" asked the prudent captain.

"Harry Norman is very well off; he has a

private fortune. Both of them have excellent situations."

"To my way of thinking that other chap is the better fellow. At any rate he seems to have more gumption about him."

"Why, uncle, you don't mean to tell me that you think Harry Norman a fool," said Mrs. Woodward. Harry Norman was Mrs. Woodward's special friend, and she fondly indulged the hope of seeing him in time become the husband of her elder and favourite daughter; if, indeed, she can be fairly said to have had a favourite child.

Captain Cuttwater poured out another glass of rum, and dropped the subject.

Soon afterwards the whole party came in from the lawn. Katie was all draggled and wet, for she had persisted in making her way right across the island to look out for a site for another palace. Norman was a little inclined to be sulky, for Katie had got the better of him; when she had got out of the boat he could not get her into it again, and as he could not very well leave her in the island, he had been obliged to remain paddling about, while he heard the happy voices of Alaric and the two girls from the lawn. Alaric was in high good-humour, and entered the room

intent on his threatened purpose of seducing Captain Cuttwater's affections. The two girls were both blooming with happy glee, and Gertrude was especially bright in spite of the somewhat sombre demeanour of her lover.

Tea was brought in, whereupon Captain Cuttwater having taken a bit of toast and crammed it into his saucer, fell fast asleep in an arm-chair.

"You'll have very little opportunity to-night," said Linda, almost in a whisper.

"Opportunity for what?" asked Mrs. Woodward.

"Hush," said Gertrude, "we'll tell you by-and-by, mama. You'll wake Uncle Bat if you talk now."

"I am so thirsty," said Katie, bouncing into the room with dry shoes and stockings on. "I am so thirsty. Oh, Linda, do give me some tea."

"Hush," said Alaric, pointing to the Captain who was thoroughly enjoying himself, and uttering sonorous snores at regular fixed intervals.

"Sit down, Katie, and don't make a noise," said Mrs. Woodward, gently.

Katie slunk into a chair, opened wide her large bright eyes, applied herself diligently to her tea-

cup ; and then, after taking breath, said in a very audible whisper to her sister, “ Are not we to talk at all, Linda ? That will be very dull, I think.”

“ Yes, my dear, you are to talk as much as you please, and as often as you please, and as loud as you please ; that is to say, if your mama will let you,” said Captain Cuttwater, without any apparent waking effort, and in a moment the snoring was going on again as regularly as before.

Katie looked round, and again opened her eyes and laughed. Mrs. Woodward said, “ You are very good-natured, uncle.” The girls exchanged looks with Alaric ; and Norman, who had not yet recovered his good-humour, went on sipping his tea.

As soon as the tea things were gone, Uncle Bat yawned and shook himself, and asked if it was not nearly time to go to bed.

“ Whenever you like, Uncle Bat,” said Mrs. Woodward, who began to find that she agreed with Gertrude, that early habits on the part of her uncle would be a family blessing. “ But, perhaps, you’ll take something before you go ? ”

“ Well, I don’t mind if I do take a thimbleful of rum-and-water.” So the odious spirit bottle was again brought into the drawing-room.

"Did you call at the Admiralty, Sir, as you came through town?" said Alaric.

"Call at the Admiralty, Sir!" said the captain, turning sharply round at the questioner; "what the deuce should I call at the Admiralty for? craving the ladies' pardon."

"Well, indeed, I don't know," said Alaric, not a bit abashed. "But sailors always do call there; for the pleasure, I suppose, of kicking their heels in the Lords' waiting room."

"I have done with that game," said Captain Cuttwater, now wide awake; and in his energy he poured half a glass more rum into his beaker. "I have done with that game, and I'll tell you what, Mr. Tudor, if I had a dozen sons to provide for to-morrow ——."

"Oh, I do so wish you had," said Katie; "it would be such fun. Fancy Uncle Bat having twelve sons, Gertrude. What would you call them all, uncle?"

"Why, I tell you what, Miss Katie, I wouldn't call one of them a sailor; I'd sooner make tailors of them."

"Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, gentleman, apothecary, plough-boy, thief," said Katie. "That would only be eight; what should the other four be, uncle?"

" You're quite right, Captain Cuttwater," said Alaric, " at least as far as the present moment goes ; but the time is coming when things at the Admiralty will be managed very differently."

" Then I'm d—— if that time can come too soon—craving the ladies' pardon !" said Uncle Bat.

" I don't know what you mean, Alaric," said Harry Norman, who was just at present somewhat disposed to contradict his friend, and not ill-inclined to contradict the captain also ; " as far as I can judge, the Admiralty is the very last office the Government will think of touching."

" The Government !" shouted Captain Cuttwater ; " Oh ! if we are to wait for the Government, the navy may go to the deuce, Sir."

" It's the pressure from without that must do the work," said Alaric.

" Pressure from without !" said Norman scornfully ; " I hate to hear such trash."

" We'll see, young gentleman, we'll see ;" said the captain ; " it may be trash, and it may be right that five fellows who never did the Queen a day's service in their life, should get fifteen hundred or two thousand a-year, and have the power of robbing an old sailor like me of the reward due to me for sixty years' hard work.

Reward! no ; but the very wages that I have actually earned. Look at me now, d—— me, look at me ! Here I am, Captain Cuttwater—with sixty years' service—and I've done more perhaps for the Queen's navy than—than—”

“ It's too true, Captain Cuttwater,” said Alaric, speaking with a sort of mock earnestness which completely took in the captain, but stealing a glance at the same time at the two girls who sat over their work at the drawing-room table, “ it's too true ; and there's no doubt the whole thing must be altered, and that soon. In the first place, we must have a sailor at the head of the navy.”

“ Yes,” said the captain, “ and one that knows something about it too.”

“ You'll never have a sailor sitting as first lord,” said Norman authoritatively, “ unless it be when some party man, high in rank, may happen to have been in the navy as a boy.”

“ And why not ? ” said Captain Cuttwater quite angrily.

“ Because the first lord must sit in the Cabinet, and to do that he must be a thorough politician.”

“ D—— politicians ! —craving the ladies' pardon,” said Uncle Bat.

“Amen!” said Alaric.

Uncle Bat, thinking that he had thoroughly carried his point, finished his grog, took up his candlestick, and toddled off to bed.

“Well, I think I have done something towards carrying my point,” said Alaric.

“I didn’t think you were half so cunning,” said Linda laughing.

“I cannot think how you can condescend to advocate opinions diametrically opposed to your own convictions,” said Norman somewhat haughtily.

“Fee, fo, fum!” said Alaric.

“What is it all about?” said Mrs. Woodward.

“Alaric wants to do all he can to ingratiate himself with Uncle Bat,” said Gertrude; “and I am sure he’s going the right way to work.”

“It’s very good-natured on his part,” said Mrs. Woodward.

“I don’t know what you are all talking about,” said Katie, yawning, “and I think you are all very stupid; so I’ll go to bed.”

The rest soon followed her. They did not sit up so late chatting over the fire this evening, as was their wont on Saturdays, though none of them knew what cause prevented it.

CHAPTER V.

BUSHEY PARK.

THE next day being Sunday, the whole party very properly went to church ; but during the sermon Captain Cuttwater very improperly went to sleep, and snored ponderously the whole time. Katie was so thoroughly shocked that she did not know which way to look ; Norman, who had recovered his good-humour, and Alaric, could not refrain from smiling as they caught the eyes of the two girls ; and Mrs. Woodward made sundry little abortive efforts to wake her uncle with her foot. Altogether abortive they were not, for the captain would open his eyes and gaze at her for a moment in the most good-natured, lack-lustre manner conceivable ; but then, in a moment, he would be again asleep and snoring, with all the regularity of a kitchen-clock. This was at first very dreadful to the Woodwards, but after a month or two they got used to it, and so apparently did the pastor and the people of Hampton.

After church there was lunch of course ; and then, according to their wont, they went out to walk. These Sunday walks in general were matters of some difficulty. The beautiful neighbourhood of Hampton Court, with its palace-gardens and lovely park, is so popular with Londoners that it is generally alive on that day with a thronged multitude of men, women, and children, and thus becomes not an eligible resort for lovers of privacy. Captain Cuttwater, however, on this occasion insisted on seeing the chestnuts and the crowd, and, consequently, they all went into Bushey Park.

Uncle Bat, who professed himself to be a philanthropist, and who was also a bit of a democrat, declared himself delighted with what he saw. It was a great thing for the London citizens to come down there with their wives and children, and eat their dinners in the open air under the spreading trees ; and both Harry and Alaric agreed with him. Mrs. Woodward, however, averred that it would be much better if they would go to church first, and Gertrude and Linda were of opinion that the Park was spoilt by the dirty bits of greasy paper which were left about on all sides. Katie thought it very hard that, as all the Londoners were allowed to eat

their dinners in the Park, she might not have hers there also. To which Captain Cuttwater rejoined that he would give them a picnic at Richmond before the summer was over.

All the world knows how such a party as that of our friends by degrees separates itself into twos and threes, when sauntering about in shady walks. It was seldom, indeed, that Norman could induce his Dulcinea to be so complacent in his favour, but either accident or kindness on her part favoured him on this occasion, and as Katie went on eliciting from Uncle Bat fresh promises as to the picnic, Harry and Gertrude found themselves together under one avenue of trees, while Alaric and Linda were equally fortunate, or unfortunate, under another.

"I did so wish to speak a few words to you, Gertrude," said Norman; "but it seems as though, now that this captain has come among us, all our old habits and ways are to be upset."

"I don't see that *you* need say that," said she. "*We* may, perhaps, be put out a little—that is mama and Linda and I; but I do not see that you need suffer."

"Suffer—no not suffer—and yet it is suffering."

"What is suffering?" said she.

"Why, to be as we were last night—not able to speak to each other."

"Come, Harry, you should be a little reasonable," said she, laughing. "If you did not talk last night, whose fault was it?"

"I suppose you will say it was my own. Perhaps it was. But I could not feel comfortable while he was drinking gin-and-water——"

"It was rum," said Gertrude, rather gravely.

"Well, rum-and-water in your mother's drawing-room, and cursing and swearing before you and Linda, as though he were in the cockpit of a man-of-war."

"Alaric you saw was able to make himself happy, and I am sure he is not more indifferent to us than you are."

"Alaric seemed to me to be bent on making a fool of the old man; and, to tell the truth, I cannot approve of his doing so."

"It seems to me, Harry, that you do not approve of what any of us are doing," said she; "I fear we are all in your black books—Captain Cuttwater, and mama, and Alaric, and I, and all of us."

"Well now, Gertrude, do you mean to say you think it right that Katie should sit by and hear a man talk as Captain Cuttwater talked last

night? Do you mean to say that the scene which passed, with the rum and the curses, and the absurd ridicule which was thrown on your mother's uncle, was such as should take place in your mother's drawing-room?"

"I mean to say, Harry, that my mother is the best and only judge of what should, and what should not, take place there."

Norman felt himself somewhat silenced by this, and walked on for a time without speaking. He was a little too apt to take upon himself the character of Mentor, and, strange to say, he was aware of his own fault in this particular. Thus, though the temptation to preach was very powerful, he refrained himself for a while. His present desire was to say soft things rather than sharp words, and though lecturing was at this moment much easier to him than love-making, he bethought himself of his object, and controlled the spirit of morality which was strong within him.

"But we were so happy before your uncle came," he said, speaking with his sweetest voice, and looking at the beautiful girl beside him with all the love he was able to throw into his handsome face.

"And we are happy now that he has come, or

at any rate ought to be," said Gertrude, doing a little in the Mentor line herself, now that the occasion came in her way.

" Ah ! Gertrude, you know very well there is only one thing can make me happy," said Harry.

" Why, you unreasonable man, just now you said you were perfectly happy before Captain Cuttwater came. I suppose the one thing now necessary is to send him away again."

" No, Gertrude, the thing necessary is to take you away."

" What ! out of the contamination of poor old Uncle Bat's bottle of rum ? But, Harry, you see it would be cowardly in me to leave mama and Linda to suffer the calamity alone."

" I wonder, Gertrude, whether, in your heart of hearts, you really care a straw about me," said Harry, who was now very sentimental and somewhat lachrymose.

" You know we all care very much about you, and it is very wrong in you to express such a doubt," said Gertrude, with a duplicity that was almost wicked ; as if she did not fully understand that the kind of "caring" of which Norman spoke was of a very different nature from the general "caring" which she, on his behalf, shared with the rest of her family !

" All of you—yes ; but I am not speaking of

all of you ; I am speaking of you, Gertrude—you in particular. Can you ever love me well enough to be my wife ? ”

“ Well, there is no knowing what I may be able to do in three or four years’ time ; but even that must depend very much on how you behave yourself in the meantime. If you get cross because Captain Cuttwater has come here, and snub Alaric and Linda, as you did last night, and scold at mama because she chooses to let her own uncle live in her own house, why, to tell you the truth, I don’t think I ever shall.”

All persons who have a propensity to lecture others have a strong constitutional dislike to being lectured themselves. Such was decidedly the case with Harry Norman. In spite of his strong love, and his anxious desire to make himself agreeable, his brow became somewhat darkened, and his lips somewhat compressed. He would not probably have been annoyed had he not been found fault with for snubbing his friend Tudor. Why should Gertrude, his Gertrude, put herself forward to defend his friend? Let her say what she chose for her mother, or even for her profane, dram-drinking, vulgar old uncle, but it was too much that she should take up the cudgels for Alaric Tudor.

“ Well,” said he, “ I was annoyed last night,

and I must own it. It grieved me to hear Alaric turning your uncle into ridicule, and that before your mother's face ; and it grieved me to see you and Linda encourage him. In what Alaric said about the Admiralty he did not speak truthfully."

" Do you mean to say that Alaric said what was false ? "

" Inasmuch as he was pretending to express his own opinion, he did say what was false."

" Then I must and will say that I never yet knew Alaric say a word that was not true ; and, which is more, I am quite sure that he would not accuse you of falsehood behind your back in a fit of jealousy."

" Jealousy !" said Norman, looking now as black as grim death itself.

" Yes, it is jealousy. It so turned out that Alaric got on better last night with Captain Cuttwater than you did, and that makes you jealous."

" Pish !" said Norman somewhat relieved, but still sufficiently disgusted that his lady-love should suppose that he could be otherwise than supremely indifferent to the opinion of Captain Cuttwater.

The love scene, however, was fatally interrupt-

ed ; and the pair were not long before they joined the captain, Mrs. Woodward, and Katie.

And how fared it with the other pair under the other avenue of chestnuts ?

Alaric Tudor had certainly come out with no defined intention of making love, as Harry Norman had done ; but with such a companion it was very difficult for him to avoid it. Linda was much more open to attacks of this nature than her sister. Not that she was as a general rule willingly and wilfully inclined to give more encouragement to lovers than Gertrude ; but she had less power of fence, less skill in protecting herself, and much less of that haughty self-esteem which makes some women fancy that all love-making to them is a liberty, and the want of which makes others feel that all love-making is to them a compliment.

Alaric Tudor had no defined intention of making love ; but he had a sort of suspicion that he might, if he pleased, do so successfully ; and he had no defined intention of letting it alone. He was a far-seeing prudent man ; for his age perhaps too prudent ; but he was nevertheless fully susceptible of the pleasure of holding an affectionate close intercourse with so sweet a girl as Linda Woodward ; and though he knew that marriage

with a girl without a dowry would for him be a death-blow to all his high hopes, he could hardly resist the temptation of conjugating the verb to love. Had he been able to choose from the two sisters, he would probably have selected Gertrude in spite of what he had said to Norman in the boat ; but Gertrude was bespoken ; and it therefore seemed all but unnatural that there should not be some love passages between him and Linda.

Ah! Mrs. Woodward, my friend, my friend, was it well that thou should'st leave that sweet unguarded rosebud of thine to such perils as these !

They, also, commenced their wooing by talking over Captain Cuttwater ; but they did not quarrel about him. Linda was quite content to be told by her friend what she ought to do, and how she ought to think about her uncle ; and Alaric had a better way of laying down the law than Norman. He could do so without offending his hearer's pride, and consequently was generally better listened to than his friend, though his law was probably not in effect so sound.

But they had soon done with Captain Cuttwater, and Alaric had to choose another subject. Gertrude and Norman were at some distance from them, but were in sight and somewhat in advance.

"Look at Harry," said Alaric; "I know from the motion of his shoulder that he is at this moment saying something very tender."

"It is ten times more likely that they are quarrelling," said Linda.

"Oh! the quarrels of lovers—we know all about that, don't we?"

"You must not call them lovers, Alaric; mama would not like it, nor indeed would Gertrude, I am sure."

"I would not for the world do anything that Mrs. Woodward would not like; but between ourselves, Linda, are they not lovers?"

"No—that is, not that I know of. I don't believe that they are a bit," said Linda, blushing at her own fib.

"And why should they not be? How indeed is it possible that they should not be; that is—for I heartily beg Gertrude's pardon—how is it possible that Harry should not be in love with her?"

"Indeed, Gertrude is very, very beautiful," said Linda, with the faintest possible sigh, occasioned by the remembrance of her own inferior charms.

"Indeed she is, very, very beautiful," repeated Alaric, speaking with an absent air as though

his mind were fully engaged in thinking of the beauty of which he spoke.

It was not in Linda's nature to be angry because her sister was admired, and because she was not. But yet there was something in Alaric's warm tone of admiration which gave her a feeling of unhappiness which she would have been quite unable to define, even had she attempted it. She saw her sister and Harry Norman before her, and she knew in her heart that they were lovers, in spite of her little weak declaration to the contrary. She saw how earnestly her sister was loved, and she in her kindly loving nature could not but envy her her fancied happiness. Envy—no—it certainly was not envy. She would not for worlds have robbed her sister of her admirer; but it was so natural for her to feel that it must be delicious to be admired!

She did not begrudge Gertrude Norman's superior beauty, nor his greater wealth; she knew that Gertrude was entitled to more, much more, than herself. But seeing that Norman was Gertrude's lover, was it not natural that Alaric should be hers? And, then, though Harry was the handsomer and the richer, she liked Alaric so much the better of the two. But now that Alaric was alone with her, the only sub-

ject he could think to talk of, was Gertrude's beauty !

It must not be supposed that these thoughts in their plainly-developed form passed through Linda's mind. It was not that she thought all this, but that she felt it. Such feelings are quite involuntary, whereas one's thoughts are more or less under command. Linda would not have allowed herself to think in this way for worlds ; but she could not control her feelings.

They walked on side by side, perfectly silent for a minute or two, and an ill-natured tear was gathering itself in the corner of Linda's eye ; she was afraid even to raise her hand to brush it away for fear Alaric should see her, and thus it went on gathering, till it was like to fall.

" How singular it is," said Alaric, " how very singular, the way in which I find myself living with you all ! such a perfect stranger as I am."

" A perfect stranger !" said Linda, who having remembered Alaric since the days of her short frocks and lessons, looked on him as a very old friend indeed.

" Yes, a perfect stranger, if you think of it. What do any of you know about me ? Your mother never saw my mother ; your father knew nothing of my father ; there is no kindred blood

common to us. Harry Norman there is your near cousin; but what am I that I should be thus allowed to live with you, and walk with you, and have a common interest in all your doings?"

"Why, you are a dear friend of mama's, are you not?"

"A dear friend of mama's!" said he; "well, indeed, I hope I am; for your mother is at any rate a dear friend to me. But, Linda, one cannot be so much without longing to be more. Look at Harry, how happy he is!"

"But, Alaric, surely you would not interfere with Harry," said Linda, whose humble innocent heart thought still of nothing but the merits of her sister; and then remembering that it was necessary that she should admit nothing on Gertrude's behalf, she entered her little protest against the assumption that her sister acknowledged Norman for her lover. "That is, you would not do so, if there were anything in it."

"I interfere with Harry!" said Alaric, switching the heads off the bits of fern with the cane he carried. "No, indeed. I have no wish at all to do that. It is not that of which I was thinking. Harry is welcome to all his happiness; that is, if Gertrude can be brought to make him happy."

Linda made no answer now ; but the tear came running down her face, and her eyes became dim, and her heart beat very quick, and she didn't quite remember where she was. Up to this moment no man had spoken a word of love to Linda Woodward, and to some girls the first word is very trying.

"Interfere with Harry," Alaric repeated again, and renewed his attack on the ferns. "Well, Linda, what an opinion you must have of me!"

Linda was past answering ; she could not protest—nor would it have been expedient to do so—that her opinion of her companion was not unfavourable.

"Gertrude is beautiful, very beautiful," he continued, still beating about the bush as modest lovers do, and should do, "but she is not the only beautiful girl in Surbiton Cottage, nor to my eyes is she the most so."

Linda was now quite beside herself. She knew that decorum required that she should say something stiff and stately to repress such language, but if all her future character for propriety had depended on it, she could not bring herself to say a word. She knew that Gertrude, when so addressed, would have maintained her dignity, and have concealed her secret, even if she allowed

herself to have a secret to conceal. She knew that it behoved her to be repellent and antagonistic to the first vows of a first lover. But, alas! she had no power of antagonism, no energy for repulse left in her. Her knees seemed to be weak beneath her, and all she could do was to pluck to pieces the few flowers that she carried at her waist.

Alaric saw his advantage, but was too generous to push it closely; nor indeed did he choose to commit himself to all the assured intentions of a positive declaration. He wished to raise an interest in Linda's heart, and having done so, to leave the matter to chance. Something, however, it was necessary that he should say. He walked awhile by her in silence, decapitating the ferns, and then coming close to her he said—

"Linda, dear Linda! you are not angry with me?" Linda, however, answered nothing. "Linda, dearest Linda! speak one word to me."

"Don't;" said Linda through her tears. "Pray don't, Alaric; pray don't."

"Well, Linda! I will not say another word to you now. Let us walk gently; we shall catch them up quite in time before they leave the park."

And so they sauntered on, exchanging no further words. Linda by degrees recovered

her calmness, and as she did so, she found herself to be, oh ! so happy. She had never, never envied Gertrude her lover ; but it was so sweet, so very sweet, to be able to share her sister's happiness. And Alaric, was he also happy ? At the moment he doubtless enjoyed the triumph of his success. But still he had a feeling of sad care at his heart. How was he to marry a girl without a shilling ? Were all his high hopes, was all his soaring ambition to be thrown over for a dream of love ?

Ah ! Mrs. Woodward, my friend, my friend, thou who wouldest have fed thy young ones, like the pelican, with blood from thine own breast, had such feeding been of avail for them ; thou who art the kindest of mothers; has it been well for thee to subject to such perils, this poor weak young dove of thine ?

Uncle Bat had become tired with his walk, and crawled home so slowly that Alaric and Linda caught the party just as they reached the small wicket which leads out of the park on the side nearest to Hampton. Nothing was said or thought of their absence, and they all entered the house together, as though nothing of consequence had occurred to any of them. Four of them, however, were conscious that that Sunday's

walk beneath the chestnuts of Bushey Park would long be remembered.

Nothing else occurred to make the day memorable. In the evening, after dinner, Mrs. Woodward and her daughters went to church, leaving her younger guests to entertain the elder one. The elder one soon took the matter in his own hand by going to sleep; and Harry and Alaric being thus at liberty, sauntered out down the river side. They both made a forced attempt at good-humour, each speaking cheerily to the other; but there was no confidence between them as there had been on that morning when Harry rowed his friend up to London. Ah me! what had occurred between them to break the bonds of their mutual trust—to quench the ardour of their firm friendship? But so it was between them now. It was fated that they never again should place full confidence in each other.

There was no such breach between the sisters, at least not as yet; but even between them there was no free and full interchange of their hopes and fears. Gertrude and Linda shared the same room, and were accustomed—as what girls are not?—to talk half through the night of all their wishes, thoughts and feelings. And Gertrude was generally prone enough to talk of Harry

Norman. Sometimes she would say she loved him a little, just a little; at others she would declare that she loved him not at all; that is, not as heroines love in novels, not as she thought she could love, and would do, should it ever be her lot to be wooed by such a lover as her young fancy pictured to her. Then she would describe her beau ideal, and the description certainly gave no counterpart of Harry Norman. To tell the truth, however, Gertrude was as yet heart whole; and when she talked of love and Harry Norman, she did not know what love was.

On this special Sunday evening she was disinclined to speak of him at all. Not that she loved him more than usual, but that she was beginning to think that she could not ever really love him at all. She had taught herself to think that he might probably be her husband, and had hitherto felt no such repugnance to her destiny as caused her to shun the subject. But now she was beginning to think of the matter seriously; and as she did so, she felt that life might have for her a lot more blessed than that of sharing the world with her cousin Harry.

When, therefore, Linda began to question her about her lover, and to make little hints of her desire to tell what Alaric had said of her and

Norman, Gertrude gave her no encouragement. She would speak of Captain Cuttwater, of Katie's lessons, of the new dress they were to make for their mother, of Mr. Everscreech's long sermon, of anything in fact but of Harry Norman.

Now this was very hard on poor Linda. Her heart was bursting within her to tell her sister that she also was beloved; but she could not do so without some little encouragement.

In all their conferences she took the cue of the conversation from her sister; and though she could have talked about Alaric by the hour if Gertrude would have consented to talk about Harry, she did not know how to start the subject of her own lover, while Gertrude was so cold and uncommunicative as to hers. She struggled very hard to obtain the privilege for which she so anxiously longed; but in doing so she only met with a sad and sore rebuff.

"Gertrude," at last said Linda, when Gertrude thought that the subject had been put to rest at any rate for that night, "don't you think mama would be pleased if she knew that you had engaged yourself to Harry Norman?"

"No," said Gertrude, evincing her strong mind by the tone in which she spoke; "I do not. If mama wished it, she would have told

me, for she never has any secrets. I should be as wrong to engage myself with Harry as you would be with Alaric. For though Harry has property of his own while poor Alaric has none, he has a very insufficient income for a married man, and I have no fortune with which to help him. If nothing else prevented it, I should consider it wicked in me to make myself a burden to a man while he is yet so young and comparatively so poor."

Prudent, sensible, high-minded, well-disciplined Gertrude! But had her heart really felt a spark of love for the man of whom she spoke, how much would prudent, sensible, high-minded considerations have weighed with her? Alas! not a feather.

Having made her prudent, high-minded speech, she turned round and slept; and poor Linda also turned round and bedewed her pillow. She no longer panted to tell her sister of Alaric's love.

On the next morning the two young men returned to town, and the customary dulness of the week began.

CHAPTER VI.

SIR GREGORY HARDLINES.

GREAT changes had been going on at the Weights and Measures ; or rather it might be more proper to say that great changes were now in progress. From that moment in which it had been hinted to Mr. Hardlines that he must relax the rigour of his examinations, in order that merit of a less exalted nature than that thought necessary by himself might find its way into the office, he had pondered deeply over the matter. Hitherto he had confined his efforts to his own office, and, so far from feeling personally anxious for the amelioration of the Civil Service generally, had derived no inconsiderable share of his happiness from the knowledge that there were such sinks of iniquity as the Internal Navigation. To be widely different from others was Mr. Hardlines' glory. He was, perhaps, something of a Civil Service Pharisee, and wore on his forehead a broad philactory, stamped with the mark of Crown property. He thanked God that he was not as those publicans at Somerset House, and

took glory to himself in paying tithes of official cummin.

But now he was driven to a wider range. Those higher Pharisees who were above him in his own pharisaical establishment, had interfered with the austerity of his worship. He could not turn against them there, on their own ground. He, of all men, could not be disobedient to official orders. But if he could promote a movement beyond the walls of the Weights and Measures ; if he could make Pharisees of those benighted publicans in the Strand ; if he could introduce conic sections into the Custom House, and political economy into the Post Office ; if, by any effort of his, the Foreign Office clerks could be forced to attend punctually at ten ; and that wretched saunterer, whom five days a week he saw lounging into the Council Office opposite to him, if he could be made to mend his pace, what a wide field for his ambition would Mr. Hard-lines then have found !

Great ideas opened themselves to his mind as he walked to and from his office daily. What if he could become the parent of a totally different order of things ! What if the Civil Service, through his instrumentality, should become the nucleus of the best intellectual diligence in the

country, instead of being a byeword for sloth and ignorance ! Mr. Hardlines meditated deeply on this, and, as he did so, it became observed on all sides that he was an altered man as regarded his solicitude for the Weights and Measures. One or two lads crept in, by no means conspicuous for their attainments in abstract science ; young men, too, were observed to leave not much after four o'clock, without calling down on themselves Mr. Hardlines' usual sarcasm. Some said he was growing old, others that he was broken-hearted. But Mr. Hardlines was not old, nor broken in heart or body. He was thinking of higher things than the Weights and Measures, and at last he published a pamphlet.

“ Oh, that mine adversary had written a book,” was the exclamation of Job, when he bethought himself of that particular accident which would give him the greatest hold over his enemy. Mr. Hardlines had many enemies, all in the Civil Service, one of the warmest of whom was Mr. Oldeschole of the Navigation, and at first they rejoiced greatly that Job’s wish had been accomplished on their behalf. They were down on Mr. Hardlines with reviews, counter pamphlets, official statements, and indignant contradiction ; but Mr. Hardlines lived through this storm of

missiles, and got his book to be feted and made much of by some Government pundits, who were very big wigs indeed. And at last he was invited over to the building on the other side, to discuss the matter with a President, a Secretary of State, a Lord Commissioner, two joint Secretaries, and three Chairmen.

And then, for a period of six months, the light of Mr. Hardlines' face ceased to shine on the children of the Weights and Measures, and they felt, one and all, that the glory had in a certain measure departed from their house. Now and again Mr. Hardlines would look in, but he did so rather as an enemy than as a friend. There was always a gleam of antagonistic triumph in his eye, which showed that he had not forgotten the day when he was called in question for his zeal. He was felt to be in opposition to his own Board, rather than in co-operation with it. The Secretary and the Assistant-Secretaries would say little caustic things about him to the senior clerks, and seemed somewhat to begrudge him his new honours. But for all this Mr. Hardlines cared little. The President and the Secretary of State, the joint Secretaries and the Chairmen, all allowed themselves to be led by him in this matter. His ambition was about to be gratified.

It was his destiny that he should remodel the Civil Service. What was it to him whether or no one insignificant office would listen to his charming? Let the Secretary at the Weights and Measures sneer as he would; he would make that hero of the metallic currency know that he, Mr. Hardlines, was his master.

At the end of six months his budding glory broke out into splendid full-blown many-coloured flowers. He resigned his situation at the Weights and Measures, and was appointed Chief-Commissioner of the Board of Civil Service Examination, with a salary of £2000 a-year; he was made a K.C.B., and shone forth to the world as Sir Gregory Hardlines; and he received a present of £1000, that happy *ne plus ultra* of Governmental liberality. Sir Gregory Hardlines was forced to acknowledge to himself that he was born to a great destiny.

When Sir Gregory, as we must now call him, was first invited to give his attendance at another office, he found it expedient to take with him one of the young men from the Weights and Measures, and he selected Alaric Tudor. Now this was surprising to many, for Tudor had been brought into the office not quite in accordance with Sir Gregory's views. But during his four

years of service Alaric had contrived to smooth down any acerbity which had existed on this score ; either the paper on the strike-bushel, or his own general intelligence, or perhaps a certain amount of flattery which he threw into his daily intercourse with the chief clerk, had been efficacious, and when Sir Gregory was called upon to select a man to take with him to his new temporary office, he selected Alaric Tudor.

The main effect which such selection had upon our story rises from the circumstance that it led to an introduction between Tudor and the Honorable Undecimus Scott, and that this introduction brought about a close alliance.

We will postpone for a short while such description of the character and position of this gentleman as it may be indispensable to give, and will in this place merely say that the Honorable Undecimus Scott had been chosen to act as secretary to the temporary commission that was now making inquiry as to the proposed Civil Service examinations, and that, in this capacity he was necessarily thrown into communication with Tudor. He was a man who had known much of officialities, had filled many situations, was acquainted with nearly all the secretaries, assistant-secretaries, and private secre-

taries in London, had been in Parliament, and was still hand-and-glove with all young members who supported Government. Tudor, therefore, thought it a privilege to know him, and allowed himself to become, in a certain degree, subject to his influence.

When it was declared to the world of Downing-street that Sir Gregory Hardlines was to be a great man, to have an office of his own, and to reign over assistant-commissioners and subject secretaries, there was great commotion at the Weights and Measures ; and when his letter of resignation was absolutely there, visible to the eyes of clerks, properly docketed and duly minuted, routine business was, for a day, nearly suspended. Gentlemen walked in and out from each other's rooms, asking this momentous question—Who was to fill the chair which had so long been honoured by the great Hardlines ? Who was to be thought worthy to wear that divine mantle ?

But even this was not the question of the greatest moment which at that period disturbed the peace of the office. It was well known that the chief clerk must be chosen from one of the three senior clerks, and that he would be so chosen by the voice of the Commissioners.

There were only three men who were deeply interested in this question. But who would then be the new senior clerk, and how would he be chosen? A strange rumour began to be afloat that the new scheme of competitive examination was about to be tried in filling up this vacancy, occasioned by the withdrawal of Sir Gregory Hardlines. From hour to hour the rumour gained ground, and men's minds began to be much disturbed.

It was no wonder that men's minds should be disturbed. Competitive examinations at eighteen, twenty, and twenty-two may be very well, and give an interesting stimulus to young men at college. But it is a fearful thing for a married man with a family, who has long looked forward to rise to a certain income by the worth of his general conduct and by the value of his seniority—it is a fearful thing for such a one to learn that he has again to go through his school tricks, and fill up examination papers, with all his juniors round him using their stoutest efforts to take his promised bread from out of his mouth. *Detur digno* is a maxim which will make men do their best to merit rewards; every man can find courage within his heart to be worthy; but *detur digniori* is a fearful law for such a profession as

the Civil Service. What worth can make a man safe against the possible greater worth which will come treading on his heels? The spirit of the age raises, from year to year, to a higher level the standard of education. The prodigy of 1857, who is now destroying all the hopes of the man who was well enough in 1855, will be a dunce to the tyro of 1860.

There were three or four in the Weights and Measures, who felt all this with the keenest anxiety. The fact of their being there, and of their having passed the scrutiny of Mr. Hardlines, was proof enough that they were men of high attainments, but then the question arose to them and others whether they were men exactly of those attainments, which were *now* most required. Who is to say what shall constitute the merits of the *dignior*? It may one day be conic sections, another Greek iambics, and a third German philosophy. Rumour began to say that foreign languages were now very desirable. The three excellent married gentleman who stood first in succession for the coveted promotion were great only in their vernacular.

Within a week from the secession of Sir Gregory, his immediate successor had been chosen, and it had been officially declared that the vacant

situation in the senior class was to be thrown open as a prize for the best man in the office. Here was a brilliant chance for young merit! The place was worth £600 a year, and might be gained by any one who now received no more than £100. Each person desirous of competing was to send in his name to the Secretary, on or before that day fortnight; and on that day month, the candidates were to present themselves before Sir Gregory Hardlines and his board of Commissioners.

And yet the joy of the office was by no means great. The senior of those who might become competitors, was of course a miserable disgusted man. He went about fruitlessly endeavouring to instigate rebellion against Sir Gregory, that very Sir Gregory whom he had for many years all but worshipped. Poor Jones was, to tell the truth, in a piteous case. He told the Secretary flatly that he would not compete with a lot of boys fresh from school, and his friends began to think of removing his razors. Nor were Brown and Robinson in much better plight. They both, it is true, hated Jones ruthlessly, and desired nothing better than an opportunity of supplanting him. They were, moreover, fast friends themselves; but not the less on that account had

Brown a mortal fear of Robinson, as also had Robinson a mortal fear of Brown.

Then came the bachelors. First there was Uppinall, who, when he entered the office was supposed to know everything which a young man had ever known. Those who looked most to dead knowledge, were inclined to back him as first favourite. It had, however, been remarked, that his utility as a clerk had not been equal to the profundity of his acquirements. Of all the candidates he was the most self-confident.

The next to him was Mr. A. Minusex, a wondrous arithmetician. He was one who could do as many sums without pen and paper as a learned pig ; who was so given to figures that he knew the number of stairs in every flight he had gone up and down in the metropolis ; one who, whatever the subject before him might be, never thought but always counted. Many who knew the peculiar propensities of Sir Gregory's earlier days thought that Mr. Minusex was not an unlikely candidate.

The sixth in order was our friend Norman. The Secretary and the two Assistant-Secretaries when they first put their heads together on the matter, declared that he was the most useful man in the office.

There was a seventh, named Alphabet Precis. Mr. Precis' peculiar forte was a singular happiness in official phraseology. Much that he wrote would doubtless have been considered in the purlieus of Paternoster Row as ungrammatical, if not unintelligible; but according to the syntax of Downing Street, it was equal to Macaulay and superior to Gibbon. He had frequently said to his intimate friends, that in official writing, style was everything; and of his writing it certainly did form a very prominent part. He knew well, none perhaps so well, when to beg leave to lay before the Board—and when simply to submit to the Commissioners. He understood exactly to whom it behoved the Secretary "to have the honour of being a very humble servant," and to whom the more simple "I am, Sir," was a sufficiently civil declaration. These are qualifications great in official life, but were not quite so much esteemed at the time of which we are speaking as they had been some few years previously.

There was but one other named as likely to stand with any probability of success, and he was Alaric Tudor. Among the very juniors of the office he was regarded as the great star of the office. There was a dash about him and a quick readiness for any work that came to hand

in which, perhaps, he was not equalled by any of his compeers. Then, too, he was the special friend of Sir Gregory.

But no one had yet heard Tudor say that he intended to compete with his seven seniors—none yet knew whether he would put himself forward as an adversary to his own especial friend, Norman. That Norman would be a candidate had been prominently stated. For some few days not a word was spoken, even between the friends themselves, as to Tudor's intention.

On the Sunday they were as usual at Hampton, and then the subject was mooted by no less a person than Captain Cuttwater.

"So you young gentlemen up in London are all going to be examined, are you?" said he; "what is it to be about? Who's to be first lieutenant of the ship, is that it?"

"Oh no," said Alaric, "nothing half so high as that. Boatswain's mate would be nearer the mark."

"And who is to be the successful man?"

"Oh, Harry Norman, here. He was far the first favourite in yesterday's betting."

"And how do you stand yourself?" said Uncle Bat.

"Oh! I am only an outsider," said Alaric. "They put my name down just to swell the num-

ber ; but I shall be scratched before the running begins.”

“Indeed he won’t,” said Harry. “He’ll run and distance us all. There is no one who has a chance with him. Why, he is Sir Gregory’s own pet.”

There was nothing more said on the subject at Surbiton Cottage. The ladies seemed instinctively to perceive that it was a matter which they had better leave alone. Not only were the two young men to be pitted against each other, but Gertrude and Linda were as divided in their wishes on the subject, as the two candidates could be themselves.

On the following morning, however, Norman introduced the subject. “I suppose you were only jesting yesterday,” said he, “when you told the captain that you were not going to be a candidate?”

“Indeed I can hardly say that I was either in jest or in earnest,” said Alaric. “I simply meant to decline to discuss the subject with Uncle Bat.”

“But of course you do mean to stand?” said Harry. Alaric made no answer.

“Perhaps you would rather decline to discuss the matter with me also?” said Harry.

“Not at all ; I would much prefer discussing

it, openly and honestly ; my own impression is, that I had better leave it alone."

" And why so ?" said Harry.

" Why so ?" repeated Alaric. " Well, there are so many reasons. In the first place, there would be seven to one against me ; and I must confess that if I did stand I should not like to be beaten."

" The same argument might keep us all back," said Norman.

" That's true ; but one man will be more sensitive, more cowardly if you will, than another ; and then I think no one should stand who does not believe himself to have a fair chance. His doing so might probably mar his future prospects. How can I put myself in competition with such men as Uppinall and Minusex ?"

Harry laughed slightly, for he knew it had been asked by many how such men as Uppinall and Minusex could think of putting themselves in competition with Alaric Tudor.

" That is something like mock-modesty, is it not, Alaric ?"

" No, by heaven it is not ! I know well what those men are made of, and I know, or think I know, my own abilities. I will own that I rank myself as a human creature much higher than I

rank them. But they have that which I have not; and that which they have is that which these examiners will chiefly require."

"If you have no other reason," said Norman, "I would strongly advise you to send in your name."

"Well, Harry, I have another reason; and though last it is by no means the least. You will be a candidate, and probably a successful one. To tell you the truth, I have no inclination to stand against you."

Norman turned very red, and then answered somewhat gravely: "I would advise you to lay aside that objection. I fairly tell you that I consider your chance better than my own."

"And suppose it be so, which I am sure it is not—but suppose it be so, what then?"

"Why you will do right to take advantage of it."

"Yes, and so gain a step and lose a friend!" said Alaric. "No; there can be no heartburn to me in your being selected, for though I am older than you, you are my senior in the office. But were I to be put over your head, it would in the course of nature make a division between us; and if it were possible that you should forgive it, it would be quite impossible that Gertrude

should do so. I value your friendship, and that of the Woodwards too highly to risk it."

Norman instantly fired up with true generous energy. "I should be wretched," said he, "if I thought that such a consideration weighed with you; I would rather withdraw, myself, than allow such a feeling to interfere with your projects. Indeed, after what you have said, I shall not send in my own name unless you also send in yours."

"I shall only be creating fuel for a feud," said Alaric. "To put you out of the question, no promotion could compensate to me for what I should lose at Hampton."

"Nonsense, man; you would lose nothing. Faith, I don't know whether it is not I that should lose, if I were successful at your expense."

"How would Gertrude receive me?" said Alaric, pushing the matter further than he perhaps should have done.

"We won't mind Gertrude," said Norman, with a little shade of black upon his brow. "You are an older man than I, and therefore promotion is to you of more importance than to me. You are also a poorer man. I have some means besides that drawn from my office, which,

if I marry, I can settle on my wife ; you have none such. I should consider myself to be worse than wicked if I allowed any consideration of such a nature to stand in the way of your best interests. Believe me, Alaric, that though I shall, as others, be anxious for success myself, I should, in failing, be much consoled by knowing that you had succeeded." And as he finished speaking he grasped his friend's hand warmly in token of the truth of his assertion.

Alaric brushed a tear from his eye, and ended by promising to be guided by his friend's advice. Harry Norman, as he walked into the office, felt a glow of triumph as he reflected that he had done his duty by his friend with true disinterested honesty. And Alaric, he also felt a glow of triumph as he reflected, that come what come might, there would be now no necessity for him to break with Norman or with the Woodwards. Norman must now always remember that it was at his own instigation that he, Alaric, had consented to be a candidate.

As regarded the real fact of the candidature, the prize was too great to allow of his throwing away such a chance. Alaric's present income was £200 ; that which he hoped to gain was £600 !!

CHAPTER VII.

MR. FIDUS NEVERBEND.

IMMEDIATELY on entering the office, Tudor gave it to be understood that he intended to give in his name as a candidate ; but he had hardly done so when his attention was called off from the coming examinations by another circumstance which was ultimately of great importance to him. One of the Assistant-Secretaries sent for him, and told him that his services having been required by Sir Gregory Hardlines for a week or so, he was at once to go over to that gentleman's office ; and Alaric could perceive, that as Sir Gregory's name was mentioned, the Assistant-Secretary smiled on him with no aspect of benign solicitude.

He went over accordingly, and found that Sir Gregory, having been desired to select a man for a special service in the country, had named him. He was to go down to Tavistock with another gentleman from the Woods and Forests, for the purpose of settling some disputed point as to the boundaries and privileges of certain mines situated there on Crown property.

" You know nothing about mining, I presume ?" said Sir Gregory.

" Nothing whatever," said Alaric.

" I thought not ; that was one reason why I selected you. What is wanted is a man of sharp intelligence and plain common sense, and one also who can write English ; for it will fall to your lot to draw up the report on the matter. Mr. Neverbend, who is to be your colleague, cannot put two words together."

" Mr. Neverbend !" said Alaric.

" Yes, Fidus Neverbend, of the Woods and Forests ; a very excellent public servant, and one in whom the fullest confidence can be placed. But between you and me, he will never set the Thames on fire."

" Does he understand mining ?" asked Alaric.

" He understands Government properties, and will take care that the Crown be not wronged ; but, Tudor, the Government will look to you to get the true common-sense view of the case. I trust, I mean that I really do trust, that you will not disgrace my choice."

Alaric of course promised that he would do his best, expressed the deepest gratitude to his patron, and went off to put himself into communication with Mr. Neverbend at the Woods and

Forests, having received an assurance that the examination in his own office should not take place till after his return from Tavistock. He was not slow to perceive that if he could manage to come back with all the *éclat* of a successful mission, the prestige of such a journey would go far to assist him on his coming trial.

Mr. Fidus Neverbend was an absolute dragon of honesty. His integrity was of that all-pervading nature, that he bristled with it as a porcupine does with its quills. He had theories and axioms as to a man's conduct, and the conduct especially of a man in the Queen's Civil Service, up to which no man but himself could live. Consequently no one but himself appeared to himself to be true and just in all his dealings.

A quarter of an hour spent over a newspaper was in his eyes a downright robbery. If he saw a man so employed, he would divide out the total of salary into hourly portions, and tell him to a fraction of how much he was defrauding the public. If he eat a biscuit in the middle of the day, he did so with his eyes firmly fixed on some document, and he had never been known to be absent from his office after ten or before four.

When Sir Gregory Hardlines declared that Mr. Fidus Neverbend would never set the Thames

on fire, he meant to express his opinion that that gentleman was a fool ; and that those persons who were responsible for sending Mr. Neverbend on the mission now about to be undertaken, were little better than fools themselves for so sending him. But Mr. Neverbend was no fool. He was not a disciple of Sir Gregory's school. He had never sat in that philosopher's porch, or listened to the high doctrines prevalent at the Weights and Measures. He could not write with all Mr. Precis' conventional correctness, or dispose of any subject at a moment's notice as would Mr. Uppinall ; but, nevertheless, he was no fool. Sir Gregory, like many other wise men, thought that there were no swans but of his own hatching, and would ask with all the pompous conceit of Pharisees in another age, whether good could come out of the Woods and Forests.

Sir Gregory, however, perfectly succeeded in his object of imbuing Tudor with a very indifferent opinion of his new colleague's abilities. It was his object that Tudor should altogether take the upper hand in the piece of work which was to be done between them, and that it should be clearly proved how very incapable the Woods and Forests were of doing their own business.

Mr. Fidus Neverbend, however, whatever others

in the outer world might think of him, had a high character in his own office, and did not underestimate himself. He, when he was told that a young clerk named Tudor was to accompany him, conceived that he might look on his companion rather in the light of a temporary private secretary than an equal partner, and imagined that new glory was added to him by his being so treated. The two men therefore met each other with very different views.

But though Mr. Neverbend was no fool, he was not an equal either in tact or ability to Alaric Tudor. Alaric had his interview with him, and was not slow to perceive the sort of man with whom he had to act. Of course on this occasion little more than grimaces and civility passed between them, but Mr. Neverbend, even in his grimaces and civility, managed to show that he regarded himself as decidedly No. 1 upon the occasion.

"Well, Mr. Tudor," said he, "I think of starting on Tuesday. Tuesday will not, I suppose, be inconvenient to you?"

"Sir Gregory has already told me that we are expected to be at Tavistock on Tuesday evening."

"Ah! I don't know about that," said Never-

bend ; "that may be all very well for Sir Gregory, but I rather think I shall stay the night at Plymouth."

" It will be the same to me," said Tudor ; " I haven't looked at the papers yet, so I can hardly say what may be necessary."

" No, no ; of course not. As to the papers, I don't know that there is much with which you need trouble yourself. I believe I am pretty well up in the case. But, Mr. Tudor, there will be a good deal of writing to do when we are there."

" We are both used to that, I fancy," said Tudor, " so it won't kill us."

" No, of course not. I understand that there will be a good many people for me to see, a great many conflicting interests for me to reconcile ; and probably I may find myself obliged to go down two or three of these mines."

" Well, that will be good fun," said Alaric.

Neverbend drew himself up. The idea of having fun at the cost of Government was painful to him; however, he spared the stranger his reproaches, and merely remarked that the work he surmised would be heavy enough both for the man who went below ground, and for the one who remained above.

The only point settled between them was that of their starting by an early train on the Tuesday named, and then Alaric returned to Sir Gregory's office, there to read through and digest an immense bulk of papers all bearing on the question at issue. There had, it appeared, been lately opened between the Tamar and the Tavy a new mine, which had become exceedingly prosperous—outrageously prosperous, as shareholders and directors of neighbouring mines taught themselves to believe. Some question had arisen as to the limits to which the happy possessors of this new tin Mexico were entitled to go; squabbles, of course, had been the result, and the miners and masters had fought and bled, each side in defence of its own rights. As a portion of these mines were on Crown property it became necessary that the matter should be looked to, and as the local inspector was accused of having been bribed and bought, and of being, in fact, an absolute official Judas, it became necessary to send some one to inspect the inspector. Hence had come Alaric's mission. The name of the mine in question was Wheal Mary Jane, and Alaric had read the denomination half a score of times before he learnt that there was no real female in the case.

The Sunday before he went was of course passed at Hampton, and there he received the full glory of his special appointment. He received glory, and Norman, in an equal degree, fell into the back-ground. Mrs. Woodward stuck kindly to Harry, and endeavoured, in her gentle way, to quiz the projected trip to Devonshire. But the other party was too strong, and her raillery failed to have the intended effect. Gertrude especially expressed her opinion that it was a great thing for so young a man to have been selected for such employment by such a person ; and Linda, though she said less, could not prevent her tell-tale face from saying more. Katie pretended that Alaric would certainly marry Mary Jane Wheal, and bring her to Surbiton Cottage, and Captain Cuttwater offered to the hero introductions to all the old naval officers at Devonport.

“ By jingo, I should like to go with you,” said the captain.

“ I fear the pleasure would not repay the trouble,” said Alaric, laughing.

“ Upon my word I think I’ll do it,” said the captain. “ It would be of the greatest possible service to you as an officer of the Crown. It would give you so much weight there. I could make you known, you know——”

"I could not hear of such a thing," said Alaric, trembling at the idea which Uncle Bat had conjured up.

"There is Admiral Starbod, and Captain Focassel, and old Hardaport, and Sir Jib Boom—Why, d—n me, they would all do anything for me, craving the ladies' pardon."

Alaric, in his own defence, was obliged to declare that the rules of the service especially required that he should hold no friendly communication with any one during the time that he was employed on this special service. Poor Captain Cuttwater, grieved to have his good-nature checked, was obliged to put up with this excuse, and consoled himself with abusing the Government which could condescend to give so absurd an order.

This was on the Saturday. On the Sunday, going to church, the Captain suggested that Alaric might, at any rate, just call upon Sir Jib on the sly. "It would be a great thing for you," said Uncle Bat. "I'll write a note to-night, and you can take it with you. Sir Jib is a rising man, and you'll regret it for ever if you miss the opportunity." Now Sir Jib Boom was between seventy and eighty, and he and Captain Cuttwater had met each other nearly every day

for the last twenty years, and had never met without a squabble.

After church they had their usual walk, and Linda's heart palpitated as she thought that she might have to undergo another *tête-à-tête* with her lover. But it palpitated in vain. It so turned out that Alaric either avoided, or, at any rate, did not use the privilege, and Linda returned home with an undefined feeling of gentle disappointment. She had fully made up her mind to be very staid, very discreet, and very collected; to take a leaf out of her sister's book, and give him no encouragement whatever; she would not absolutely swear to him that she did not now, and never could, return his passion; but she would point out how very imprudent any engagement between two young persons, situated as they were, must be—how foolish it would be for them to bind themselves, for any number of years, to a marriage which must be postponed; she would tell Alaric all this, and make him understand that he was not to regard himself as affianced to her; but she with a woman's faith would nevertheless remain true to him. This was Linda's great resolve, and the strong hope, that in a very few weeks, Alaric would be promoted to a marrying income of 600*l.* per

annum, made the prospect of the task not so painful as it might otherwise have been. Fate, however, robbed her of the pleasure, if it would have been a pleasure, of sacrificing her love to her duty; and "dear Linda, dearest Linda," was not again whispered into her ear.

"And what on earth is it that you are to do down in the mines?" asked Mrs. Woodward as they sat together in the evening.

"Nothing on the earth, Mrs. Woodward—it is to be all below the surface, forty fathom deep," said Alaric.

"Take care that you ever come up again," said she.

"They say the mine is exceedingly rich—perhaps I may be tempted to stay down there."

"Then you'll be like the gloomy gnome, that lives in dark, cold mines," said Katie.

"Isn't it very dangerous, going down into those places?" asked Linda.

"Men go down and come up again every day of their lives, and what other men can do, I can, I suppose."

"That doesn't follow at all," said Captain Cuttwater. "What sort of a figure would you make on a yard-arm, reefing a sail in a gale of wind?"

"Pray do take care of yourself," said Gertrude.

Norman's brow grew black. "I thought that it was settled that Mr. Neverbend was to go down, and that you were to stay above ground," said he.

"So Mr. Neverbend settled it; but that arrangement may, perhaps, be unsettled again," said Alaric, with a certain feeling of confidence in his own strong will.

"I don't at all doubt," said Mrs. Woodward, "that if we were to get a sly peep at you, we should find you both sitting comfortably at your inn all the time, and that neither of you will go a foot below the ground."

"Very likely. All I mean to say is, that if Neverbend goes down I'll go too."

"But mind, you gloomy gnome, mind you bring up a bit of gold for me," said Katie.

On the Monday morning he started with the often expressed good wishes of all the party, and with a note for Sir Jib Boom, which the captain made him promise that he would deliver, and which Alaric fully determined to lose long before he got to Plymouth.

That evening he and Norman passed together. As soon as their office hours were over, they went into the London Exhibition, which was then open; and there walking up and down the long

centre aisle, they talked with something like mutual confidence of their future prospects. This was a favourite resort with Norman, who had schooled himself to feel an interest in works of art. Alaric's mind was of a different cast ; he panted rather for the great than the beautiful ; and was inclined to ridicule the growing taste of the day for torsos, Palissy ware, and Assyrian monsters.

There was then some mutual confidence between the two young men. Norman, who was apt to examine himself and his own motives more strongly than Alaric ever did, had felt that something like suspicion as to his friend had crept over him ; and he had felt also that there was no ground for such suspicion. He had determined to throw it off, and to be again cordial with his companion. He had resolved so to do before his last visit at Hampton ; but it was at Hampton that the suspicion had been engendered, and there he found himself unable to be genial, kindly, and contented. Surbiton Cottage was becoming to him anything but the abode of happiness that it had once been. A year ago he had been the hero of the Hampton Sundays ; he could not but now feel that Alaric had, as it were, supplanted him with his own friends. The

arrival even of so insignificant a person as Captain Cuttwater—and Captain Cuttwater was very insignificant in Norman's mind—had done much to produce this state of things. He had been turned out of his bedroom at the cottage, and had therefore lost those last, loving, lingering words, sometimes protracted to so late an hour, which had been customary after Alaric's departure to his inn—those last lingering words which had been so sweet because their sweetness had not been shared with his friend.

He could not be genial and happy at Surbiton Cottage; but he was by no means satisfied with himself that he should not have been so. When he found that he had been surly with Alaric he was much more angry with himself than Alaric was with him. Alaric, indeed, was indifferent about it. He had no wish to triumph over Harry, but he had an object to pursue, and he was not the man to allow himself to be diverted from it by any one's caprice.

"This trip is a great thing for you," said Harry.

"Well, I really don't know. Of course I could not decline it; but on the whole I should be just as well pleased to have been spared. If I get through it well, why it will be well. But even that cannot help me at this examination."

"I don't know that."

"Why—a week passed in the slush of a Cornish mine won't teach a man algebra."

"It will give you *prestige*."

"Then you mean to say the examiners won't examine fairly; well, perhaps so. But what will be the effect on me if I fail? I know nothing of mines. I have a colleague with me of whom I can only learn that he is not weak enough to be led, or wise enough to lead; who is so self-opinionated, that he thinks he is to do the whole work himself, and yet so jealous, that he fears I shall take the very bread out of his mouth. What am I to do with such a man?"

"You must manage him," said Harry.

"That is much easier said than done," replied Alaric. "I wish you had the task instead of me."

"So do not I. Sir Gregory, when he chose you, knew what he was about."

"Upon my word, Harry, you are full of compliments to-day. I really ought to take my hat off."

"No, I am not; I am in no mood for compliments. I know very well what stuff you are made of. I know your superiority to myself. I know you will be selected to go up over all our heads. I feel all this; and Alaric, you must not

be surprized that to a certain degree it is painful to me to feel it. But by God's help I will get over it; and if you succeed it shall go hard with me, but I will teach myself to rejoice at it. Look at that fawn there," said he, turning away his face to hide the tear in his eye, " did you ever see more perfect motion?"

Alaric was touched; but there was more triumph than sympathy in his heart. It was sweet, much too sweet, to him to hear his superiority thus acknowledged. He *was* superior to the men who worked round him in his office. He was made of a more plastic clay than they, and despite the inferiority of his education he knew himself to be fit for higher work than they could do. As the acknowledgment was made to him by the man whom of those around him he certainly ranked second to himself, he could not but feel that his heart's blood ran warm within him, he could not but tread with an elastic step.

But it behoved him to answer Harry, and to answer him in other spirit than this.

" Oh, Harry," said he, " you have some plot to ruin me by my own conceit; to make me blow myself out and destroy myself, poor frog that I am, in trying to loom as largely as that great cow, Fidus Neverbend. You know I am fully

conscious how much inferior my education has been to yours."

"Education is nothing," said Harry. Education *is* nothing; Alaric triumphantly re-echoed the words in his heart—"Education is nothing—mind, mind is everything; mind and the will." So he expressed himself to his own inner self; but out loud he spoke much more courteously.

"It is the innate modesty of your own heart, Harry, that makes you think so highly of me and so meanly of yourself. But the proof of what we each can do is yet to be seen. Years alone can decide that. That your career will be honourable and happy, of that I feel fully sure; I wish I were as confident of mine."

"But Alaric," said Norman, going on rather with the thread of his own thoughts, than answering or intending to answer what the other said, "in following up your high ambition—and I know you have a high ambition—do not allow yourself to believe that the end justifies the means, because you see that men around you act as though they believed so."

"Do I do so—do I seem to do so?" said Alaric, turning sharply round.

"Don't be angry with me, Alaric; don't think that I want to preach; but sometimes I fancy,

evening in concord together—in concord so soon to be dissolved, and, ah, perhaps never to be renewed.

On the next morning Alaric and his new companion met each other at an early hour at the Paddington station. Neverbend was rather fussy with his dispatch-box, and a large official packet, which an office messenger, dashing up in a cab, brought to him at the moment of his departure. Neverbend's enemies were wont to declare that a messenger, a cab, and a big packet always rushed up at the moment of his starting on any of his official trips. Then he had his ticket to get and his "Times" to buy, and he really had not leisure to do more than nod at Alaric till he had folded his rug around him, tried that the cushion was soft enough, and completed his arrangements for the journey.

"Well, Mr. Tudor," at last he said as soon as the train was in motion, "and how are you this morning—ready for work I hope?"

"Well, not exactly at this moment," said Alaric. "One has to get up so early for these morning trains."

"Early, Mr. Tudor! my idea is that no hour should be considered either early or late when the Crown requires our services."

"Just at present the Crown requires nothing else of us, I suppose, but that we should go along at the rate of forty miles an hour."

"There is nothing like saving time," said Neverbend. "I know you have, as yet, had no experience in these sort of cases, so I have brought you the papers which refer to a somewhat similar matter that occurred in the forest of Dean. I was sent down there, and this is the report which I then wrote. I propose to take it for the model of that which we shall have to draw up when we return from Tavistock;" and as he spoke he produced a voluminous document, or treatise, in which he had contrived to render more obscure some matter that he had been sent to clear up, on the crown property in the forest of Dean.

Now Alaric had been told of this very report, and was aware that he was going to Tavistock, in order that the joint result of his and Mr. Neverbend's labours might be communicated to the crown officers in intelligible language.

The monster report before him contained twenty-six pages of close folio writing, and he felt that he really could not oblige Mr. Neverbend by reading it.

"Forest of Dean ! ah, that's coal, is it not?" said Alaric. "Mary Jane seems to be exclusively

in the tin line. I fear there will be no analogy."

"The cases are in many respects similar," said Neverbend, "and the method of treating them——"

"Then I really cannot concur with you as to the propriety of my reading it. I should feel myself absolutely wrong to read a word of such a report, for fear I might be prejudiced by your view of the case. It would, in my mind, be positively dishonest in me to encourage any bias in my own feelings either on one side, or the other."

"But really, Mr. Tudor——"

"I need not say how much personal advantage it would be to me to have the benefit of your experience, but my conscience tells me that I should not do it—so I think I'll go to sleep."

Mr. Neverbend did not know what to make of his companion; whether to admire the high tone of his official honesty, or to reprobate his idleness in refusing to make himself master of the report. While he was settling the question in his own mind, Tudor went to sleep, and did not wake till he was invited to partake of ten minutes' refreshment at Swindon.

"I rather think," said Mr. Neverbend, "that I shall go on to Tavistock to-night."

"Oh! of course," said Alaric. "I never for a moment thought of stopping short of it;" and, taking out a book, he showed himself disinclined for further conversation.

"Of course, it's open to me to do as I please in such a matter," said Neverbend, continuing his subject as soon as they reached the Bristol station, "but on the whole I rather think we had better go on to Tavistock to-night."

"No, I will not stop at Plymouth," he said, as he passed by Taunton; and on reaching Exeter he declared that he had fully made up his mind on the subject.

"We'll get a chaise at Plymouth," said Alaric.

"I think there will be a public conveyance," said Neverbend.

"But a chaise will be the quickest," said the one.

"And much the dearest," said the other.

"That won't signify much to us," said Alaric, "we shan't pay the bill."

"It will signify a great deal to me," said Neverbend, with a look of ferocious honesty; and so they reached Plymouth.

On getting out of the railway carriage, Alaric at once hired a carriage with a pair of horses; the luggage was strapped on, and Mr. Neverbend,

before his time for expostulation had fairly come, found himself posting down the road to Tavistock, followed at a respectful distance by two coaches and an omnibus.

They were soon drinking tea together at the Bedford Hotel, and I beg to assure any travelling readers that I may have, that they might have drank tea in a much worse place. Mr. Neverbend, though he made a great struggle to protect his dignity, and maintain the superiority of his higher rank, felt the ground sinking from beneath his foot from hour to hour. He could not at all understand how it was, but even the servants at the hotel seemed to pay more deference to Tudor than to him ; and before the evening was over he absolutely found himself drinking port-wine negus, because his colleague had ordered it for him.

“And now,” said Neverbend, who was tired with his long journey, “I think I’ll go to bed.”

“Do,” said Alaric, who was not at all tired, “and I’ll go through this infernal mass of papers. I have hardly looked at them yet. Now that I am in the neighbourhood I shall better understand the strange names.”

So Alaric went to work, and studied the dry subject that was before him. It will luckily not

be necessary for us to do so also. It will be sufficient for us to know that Wheal Mary Jane was at that moment the richest of all the rich mines that had then been opened in that district ; that the, or its, or her shares (which is the proper way of speaking of them I am shamefully ignorant) were at an enormous premium ; that these two Commissioners would have to see and talk to some scores of loud and angry men, deeply interested in their success or failure, and that that success or failure might probably in part depend on the view which these two Commissioners might take.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HON. UNDECIMUS SCOTT.

THE HON. UNDECIMUS SCOTT was the eleventh son of the Lord Gaberlunzie. Lord Gaberlunzie was the representative of a very old and very noble race, more conspicuous, however, at the present time for its age and nobility than for its wealth. The Hon. Undecimus, therefore, learnt, on arriving at manhood, that he was heir only to the common lot of mortality, and that he had to earn his own bread. This, however, could not have surprised him much, as nine of his brethren had previously found themselves in the same condition.

Lord Gaberlunzie certainly was not one of those wealthy peers who are able to make two or three elder sons, and after that to establish any others that may come with comfortable younger children's portions. The family was somewhat accustomed to the *res angusta domi*; but they were fully alive to the fact, that a noble brood, such as their own, ought always to be able to achieve comfort and splendour in the world's

broad field, by due use of those privileges which spring from a noble name. Cauld-Kale Castle, in Aberdeenshire, was the family residence ; but few of the eleven young Scotts were ever to be found there after arriving at that age at which they had been able to fly from the paternal hall.

It is a terrible task, that of having to provide for eleven sons. With two or three a man may hope, with some reasonable chance of seeing his hope fulfilled, that things will go well with him, and that he may descend to his grave without that worst of wretchedness, that gnawing grief which comes from bad children. But who can hope that eleven sons will all walk in the narrow path ? In such a flock, there cannot but be a black sheep ; and it is well if the colour of one or two do not taint the whole. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them ! we have the highest authority for trusting in such happiness, and, doubtless, if the arrows be all straight, the joy is increased as the bundle becomes large ; but yet in this sinful sorrowing world the risk and burden of a patriarchal progeny is very great.

Had Lord Gaberlunzie, however, been himself a patriarch, and ruled the pastoral plains of

Palestine, instead of the bleak mountains which surround Cauld-Kale Castle, he could not have been more indifferent as to the number of his sons. They flew away each as his time came, with the early confidence of young birds, and as seldom returned to disturb the family nest.

They were a cannie, comely, sensible brood. Their father and mother, if they gave them nothing else, gave them strong bodies and sharp brains. They were very like each other, though always with a difference. Red hair, bright as burnished gold, high, but not very high cheek bones, and small sharp twinkling eyes, were the Gaberlunzie personal characteristics. There were three in the army, two in the navy, and one at a foreign embassy; one was at the diggings, another was chairman of a railway company, and our own more particular friend, Undecimus, was picking up crumbs about the world in a manner that satisfied the paternal mind that he was quite able to fly alone.

There is a privilege common to the sons of all noble lords, the full value of which the young Scotts learnt very early in life—that of making any woman with a tocher an honourable lady. “Ye maun be a puir chiel, gin ye’ll be worth less than ten thoosand pounds in the market o’

marriage ; and ten thoosand pounds is a gawcey grand heritage !” Such had been the fatherly precept which Lord Gaberlunzie had striven to instil into each of his noble sons ; and it had not been thrown away upon them. One after the other they had gone forth into the market-place alluded to, and had sold themselves with great ease and admirable discretion. There had been but one Moses in the lot : the Hon. Gordon Hamilton Scott had certainly brought home a bundle of shagreen spectacle cases in the guise of a widow with an exceedingly doubtful jointure ; doubtful indeed at first, but very soon found to admit of no doubt whatever. He was the one who, with true Scotch enterprise, was prosecuting his fortunes at the Bendigo diggings, while his wife consoled herself at home with her title.

Undecimus, with filial piety, had taken his father exactly at his word, and swapped himself for £10,000. He had, however, found himself imbued with much too high an ambition to rest content with the income arising from his matrimonial speculation. He had first contrived to turn his real £10,000 into a fabulous £50,000, and had got himself returned to Parliament for the Tillietudlem district burghs on the credit of

his great wealth ; he then set himself studiously to work to make a second market by placing his vote at the disposal of the Government.

Nor had he failed of success in his attempt, though he had hitherto been able to acquire no high or permanent post. He had soon been appointed private secretary to the first lord of the Stanneries, and he found that his duty in this capacity required him to assist the Government whip in making and keeping houses. This occupation was congenial to his spirit, and he worked hard and well at it ; but the greatest of men are open to the tainting breath of suspicion, and the Honourable Undecimus Scott, or Undy Scott, as he was generally now called, did not escape. Ill-natured persons whispered that he was not on all occasions true to his party ; and once when his master, the whip-in-chief, overborne with too much work, had been tempted to put himself to bed comfortably in his own house, instead of on his usual uneasy couch behind the Speaker's chair, Undy had greatly failed. The leader of a party, whose struggles for the religion of his country had hitherto met but small success, saw at a glance the opportunity which fortune had placed in his way ; he spied with eagle eye the nakedness of that land of promise

which is compressed in the district round the Treasury benches ; the barren field before him was all his own, and he put and carried his motion for closing the parks on Sundays.

He became a hero ; but Undy was all but undone. The highest hope of the Sabbatarian had been to address an almost empty house for an hour and a-half on this his favourite subject. But the chance was too good to be lost ; he sacrificed his oratorial longings on the altar of party purpose, and limited his speech to a mere statement of his motion. Off flew on the wings of Hansom a youthful member, more trusty than the trusted Undy, to the abode of the now couchant Treasury Argus. Morpheus had claimed him all for his own. He was lying in true enjoyment, with his tired limbs stretched between the unaccustomed sheets, and snoring with free and sonorous nose, restrained by the contiguity of no Speaker's elbow. But even in his deepest slumber the quick wheels of the bounding cab struck upon the tympanum of his anxious ear. He roused himself as does a noble watch-dog when the ‘ suspicious tread of theft ’ approaches. The hurry of the jaded horse, the sudden stop, the maddened furious knock, all told a tale which his well-trained ear only knew too well. He sat

up for a moment listening in his bed, stretched himself with one involuntary yawn, and then stood upright on the floor. It should not at any rate be boasted by any one that he had been found in bed.

With elastic step, three stairs at a time, up rushed that young and eager member. It was well for the nerves of Mrs. Whip Vigil that the calls of society still held her bound in some distant brilliant throng ; for no consideration would have stopped the patriotic energy of that sucking statesman. Mr. Vigil had already performed the most important act of a speedy toilet, when his door was opened, and as his young friend appeared was already buttoning his first brace.

“Pumpkin is up !” said the eager juvenile, “and we have only five men in the house.”

“And where the devil is Undy Scott ?” said the Right Hon. Mr. Vigil.

“The devil only knows,” said the other.

“I deserve it for trusting him,” said the conscience-stricken but worthy public servant. By this time he had on his neckcloth and boots ; in his eager haste to serve his country he had forgotten his stockings. “I deserve it for trusting him—and how many men have they ?”

“Forty-one, when I left.”

"Then they'll divide of course?"

"Of course they will," said the promising young dove of the Treasury.

And now Mr. Whip Vigil had buttoned on that well-made frock with which the Parliamentary world is so conversant, and as he descended the stairs, arranged with pocket-comb his now grizzling locks. His well-brushed hat stood ready to his touch below, and when he entered the cab he was apparently as well dressed a gentleman as when about three hours after noon he may be seen with slow and easy step entering the halls of the Treasury chambers.

But ah! alas, he was all too late. He came but to see the ruin which Undy's defection had brought about. He might have taken his rest, and had a quiet mind till the next morning's "Times" revealed to him the fact of Mr. Pumpkin's grand success. When he arrived the numbers were being taken, and he, even he, Mr. Whip Vigil, he the great arch-numberer, was excluded from the number of the counted. When the doors were again open, the Commons of England had decided by a majority of 41 to 7 that the parks of London should, one and all, be closed on Sundays, and Mr. Pumpkin had achieved among his own set a week's immortality.

"We mustn't have this again, Vigil," said a very great man the next morning, with a good-humoured smile on his face, however, as he uttered the reprimand. "It will take us a whole night, and God knows how much talking, to undo what those fools did yesterday."

Mr. Vigil resolved to leave nothing again to the unassisted industry or honesty of Undy Scott, and consequently that gentleman's claims on his party did not stand so highly as they might have done but for this accident. Parliament was soon afterwards dissolved, and either through the luke-warm support of his Government friends, or else in consequence of his great fortune having been found to be ambiguous, the independent electors of the Tillietudlem burghs took it into their heads to unseat Mr. Scott. Unseated for Tillietudlem, he had no means of putting himself forward elsewhere, and he had to repent, in the sackcloth and ashes of private life, the fault which had cost him the friendship of Mr. Vigil.

His life, however, was not strictly private. He had used the Honourable before his name, and the M.P. which for a time had followed after it, to acquire for himself a seat as director at a bank board. He was a Vice-President of the Caledonian, English, Irish, and General European and

American Fire and Life Assurance Society; such, at least, had been the name of the joint-stock company in question when he joined it; but he had obtained much credit by adding the word "Oriental," and inserting it after the allusion to Europe; he had tried hard to include the fourth quarter of the globe; but, as he explained to some of his friends, it would have made the name too cumbrous for the advertisements. He was a director also of one or two minor railways, dabbled in mining shares, and, altogether, did a good deal of business in the private stock-jobbing line.

In spite of his former delinquencies, his political friends did not altogether throw him over. In the first place, the time might come when he would be again useful, and then he had managed to acquire that air and tact which makes one official man agreeable to another. He was always good-humoured; when in earnest, there was a dash of drollery about him; in his most comic moods he ever had some serious purpose in view; he thoroughly understood the esoteric and exoteric bearings of modern politics, and knew well that though he should be a model of purity before the public it did not behove him to be very strait-laced with his own party. He took everything in good part, was not over talkative, over pushing,

or presumptuous; he felt no strong bias of his own ; had at his fingers' ends the cant phraseology of ministerial subordinates, and knew how to make himself useful. He knew also—a knowledge much more difficult to acquire—how to live among men so as never to make himself disagreeable.

But then he could not be trusted ! True. But how many men in his walk of life can be trusted ? And those who can—at how terribly high a price do they rate their own fidelity ! How often must a minister be forced to confess to himself that he cannot afford to employ good faith ! Undy Scott, therefore, from time to time, received some ministerial bone, some Civil Service scrap of victuals, thrown to him from the Government table, which, if it did not suffice to maintain him in all the comforts of a Treasury career, still preserved for him a connection with the Elysium of public life ; gave him, as it were, a link by which he could hang on round the outer corners of the State's temple, and there watch with advantage till the doors of Paradise should be re-opened to him. He was no Lucifer, who, having wilfully rebelled against the high majesty of Heaven, was doomed to suffer for ever in unavailing, but still proud misery, the penalties of his asserted independence ; but a poor Peri, who had made a lapse, and thus forfeited, for

a while, the joys of Heaven, and was now seeking for some welcome offering, striving to perform some useful service, by which he might regain his lost glory.

The last of the good things thus tendered to him was not yet all consumed. When Mr. Hard-lines, now Sir Gregory, was summoned to assist at, or rather preside over, the deliberations of the committee, which was to organize a system of examination for the Civil Service, the Hon. U. Scott had been appointed secretary to that committee. This, to be sure, afforded but a fleeting moment of halcyon bliss ; but a man like Mr. Scott knew how to prolong such a moment to its uttermost stretch. The committee had ceased to sit, and the fruits of their labour were already apparent in the establishment of a new public office, presided over by Sir Gregory ; but still the clever Undy continued to draw his salary.

Undy was one of those men who, though married and the fathers of families, are always seen and known "*en garçon*." No one had a larger circle of acquaintance than Undy Scott ; no one, apparently, a smaller circle than Mrs. Undy Scott. So small, indeed, was it, that its *locale* was utterly unknown in the fashionable world. At the time of which we are now speaking Undy

was the happy possessor of a bedroom in Waterloo Place, and rejoiced in all the comforts of a first-rate club. But the sacred spot, in which at few and happy intervals he received the caresses of the wife of his bosom and the children of his loins, is unknown to the author.

In age Mr. Scott, at the time of the Tavistock mining inquiry, was about thirty-five. Having sat in Parliament for five years, he had now been out for four, and was anxiously looking for the day when the universal scramble of a general election might give him another chance. In person he was, as we have said, stalwart and comely, hirsute with copious red locks, not only over his head, but under his chin and round his mouth. He was well made, six feet high, neither fat nor thin, and he looked like a gentleman. He was careful in his dress, but not so as to betray the care that he took; he was imperturbable in temper, though restless in spirit; and the one strong passion of his life was the desire of a good income at the cost of the public.

He had an easy way of getting intimate with young men when it suited him; and as easy a way of dropping them afterwards when that suited him. He had no idea of wasting his time or opportunities in friendships. Not that

he was indifferent as to his companions, or did not appreciate the pleasure of living with pleasant men, but that life was too short, and with him the race too much up hill, to allow of his indulging in such luxuries. He looked on friendship as one of those costly delights with which none but the rich should presume to gratify themselves. He could not afford to associate with his fellow men on any other terms than those of making capital of them. It was not for him to walk and talk and eat and drink with a man because he liked him. How could the eleventh son of a needy Scotch peer, who had to maintain his rank and position by the force of his own wit, how could such a one as he live, if he did not turn to some profit even the convivialities of existence !

Acting in accordance with his fixed and conscientious rule in this respect, Undy Scott had struck up an acquaintance with Alaric Tudor. He saw that Alaric was no ordinary clerk, that Sir Gregory was likely to have the Civil Service under his thumb, and that Alaric was a great favourite with the great man. It would but little have availed Undy to have striven to be intimate with Sir Gregory himself. The Knight Companion of the Bath would have been deaf to

his blandishments ; but it seemed probable that the ears of Alaric might be tickled.

And thus Alaric and Undy Scott had become fast friends ; that is, as fast as such friends generally are. Alaric was no more blind to his own interest than was his new ally. But there was this difference between them ; Undy lived altogether in the utilitarian world which he had formed around himself, whereas Alaric lived in two worlds. When with Undy his pursuits and motives were much such as those of Undy himself ; but at Surbiton Cottage, and with Harry Norman, he was still susceptible of a higher feeling. He had been very cold to poor Linda on his last visit to Hampton ; but it was not that his heart was too hard for love. He had begun to discern that Gertrude would never attach herself to Norman ; and if Gertrude were free, why should she not be his !

Poor Linda !

Scott had early heard—and of what official event did he not obtain early intelligence ?—that Neverbend was to go down to Tavistock about the Mary Jane tin mine, and that a smart colleague was required for him. He would fain, for reasons of his own, have been that smart colleague himself ; but that he knew was impossible.

He and Neverbend were the Alpha and Omega of official virtues and vices. But he took an opportunity of mentioning before Sir Gregory, in a passing unpremeditated way, how excellently adapted Tudor was for the work. It so turned out that his effort was successful, and that Tudor was sent.

The whole of their first day at Tavistock was passed by Neverbend and Alaric in hearing interminable statements from the various mining combatants, and when at seven o'clock Alaric shut up for the evening, he was heartily sick of the job. The next morning before breakfast he sauntered out to air himself in the front of the hotel, and who should come whistling up the street, with a cigar in his mouth, but his new friend Undy Scott.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. MANYLODES.

ALARIC TUDOR was very much surprised. Had he seen Sir Gregory himself, or Captain Cuttwater, walking up the street of Tavistock, he could not have been more startled. It first occurred to him that Scott must have been sent down as a third Commissioner to assist at the investigation ; and he would have been right glad to have known that this was the case, for he found that the management of Mr. Neverbend was no pastime. But he soon learnt that such relief was not at hand for him.

“ Well, Tudor, my boy,” said he, “ and how do you like the clotted cream and the thick ankles of the stout Devonshire lasses ? ”

“ I have neither tasted the one, nor seen the other,” said Alaric. “ As yet I have encountered nothing but the not very civil tongues, and not very clear brains of Cornish roughs.”

“ A Boeotian crew ! ” said Undy ; “ but, nevertheless, they know on which side their bread is buttered—and in general it goes hard with them

but they butter it on both sides. And how does the faithful Neverbend conduct himself? Talk of Bœotians, if any man ever was born in a thick air, it must have been my friend Fidus."

Alaric merely shrugged his shoulders, and laughed slightly. "But what on earth brings you down to Tavistock?" said he.

"Oh! I am a denizen of the place, naturalized, and all but settled; have vast interests here, and a future constituency. Let the Russells look well to themselves. The time is quickly coming when you will address me in the House with bitter sarcasm as the honourable but inconsistent member for Tavistock; egad, who knows but you may have to say Right Honourable?"

"Oh! I did not know the wind blew in that quarter," said Alaric, not ill-pleased at the suggestion that he also, on some future day, might have a seat among the faithful Commons.

"The wind blows from all quarters with me," said Undy; "but in the meantime I am looking out for shares."

"Will you come in and breakfast?" asked the other.

"What, with friend Fidus? no, thanke'e; I am not, by many degrees, honest enough to suit his book. He would be down on some little

public peccadillo of mine before I had swallowed my first egg. Besides, I would not for worlds break the pleasure of your *tête-à-tête*."

" Will you come down after dinner ? "

" No ; neither after dinner, nor before breakfast—not all the coffee, nor all the claret of the Bedford shall tempt me. Remember, my friend, you are paid for it ; I am not."

" Well, then, good morning," said Alaric. " I must go in and face my fate, like a Briton."

Undy went on for a few steps, and then returned, as though a sudden thought had struck him. " But, Tudor, I have bowels of compassion within me, though no pluck. I am willing to rescue you from your misery, though I will not partake it. Come up to me this evening, and I will give you a glass of brandy punch. Your true miners never drink less generous tipple."

" How on earth am I to shake off this incubus of the Woods and Works ? "

" Shake him off? Why, make him drunk and put him to bed ; or tell him at once that the natural iniquity of your disposition makes it necessary that you should spend a few hours of the day in the company of a sinner like myself. Tell him that his virtue is too heavy for the digestive organs of your unpractised stomach.

Tell him what you will, but come. I myself am getting sick of those mining Vandals, though I am so used to dealing with them."

Alaric promised that he would come, and then went into breakfast. Undy also returned to his breakfast, well pleased with this first success in the little scheme which at present occupied his mind. The innocent young Commissioner little dreamt that the Honourable Mr. Scott had come all the way to Tavistock on purpose to ask him to drink brandy-punch at the Blue Dragon !

Another day went wearily and slowly on with Alaric and Mr. Neverbend. Tedious never-ending statements had to be taken down in writing ; the same things were repeated over and over again, and were as often contradicted ; men who might have said in five words all that they had to say, would not be constrained to say it in less than five thousand, and each one seemed to think, or pretended to seem to think, that all the outer world and the Government were leagued together to defraud the interest to which he himself was specially attached. But this was not the worst of it. There were points which were as clear as daylight ; but Tudor could not declare them to be so, as by doing so he was sure to elicit a different opinion from Mr. Neverbend.

"I am not quite so clear on that point, Mr. Tudor," he would say.

Alaric, till experience made him wise, would attempt to argue it.

"That is all very well, but I am not quite so sure of it. We will reserve the point, if you please," and so affairs went on darkly, no ray of light being permitted to shine in on the matter in dispute.

It was settled, however, before dinner, that they should both go down the Wheal Mary Jane on the following day. Neverbend had done what he could to keep this crowning honour of the inquiry altogether in his own hands, but he had found that in this respect Tudor was much too much for him.

Immediately after dinner Alaric announced that he was going to spend the evening with a friend.

"A friend!" said Neverbend, somewhat startled; "I did not know that you had any friends in Tavistock."

"Not a great many; but it so happened that I did meet a man I know this morning, and promised to go to him in the evening. I hope you'll excuse my leaving you?"

"Oh! I don't mind for myself," said Never-

bend, "though, when men are together, it's as well for them to keep together. But, Mr. Tudor——"

"Well," said Alaric, who felt growing within him a determination to put down at once anything like interference with his private hours.

"Perhaps I ought not to mention it," said Neverbend, "but I do hope you'll not get among mining people. Only think what our position here is."

"What on earth do you mean?" said Alaric. "Do you think I shall be bribed over by either side because I choose to drink a glass of wine with a friend at another hotel?"

"Bribed! No, I don't think you'll be bribed; but I think we should both keep ourselves absolutely free from all chance of being talked to on the subject, except before each other and before witnesses. I would not drink brandy-and-water at the Blue Dragon, before this report be written, even if my brother were there."

"Well, Mr. Neverbend, I am not so much afraid of myself. But wherever there are two men, there will be two opinions. So good night, if it so chance that you are in bed before my return."

So Tudor went out, and Neverbend prepared himself to sit up for him. He would sooner have remained up all night than have gone to bed before his colleague returned.

Three days Alaric Tudor had now passed with Mr. Neverbend, and not only three days but three evenings also! A man may endure to be bored in the course of business through the day, but it becomes dreadful when the infliction is extended to post-prandial hours. It does not often occur that one is doomed to bear the same bore both by day and night: any change gives some ease; but poor Alaric for three days had had no change. He felt like a liberated convict as he stept freely forth into the sweet evening air, and made his way through the town to the opposition Inn.

Here he found Undy on the door-steps with a cigar in his mouth. "Here I am, waiting for you," said he. "You are fagged to death I know, and we'll get a mouthful of fresh air before we go up stairs"—and so saying he put his arm through Alaric's, and they strolled off through the suburbs of the town.

"You don't smoke," said Undy, with his cigar-case in his hand. "Well—I believe you are right—cigars cost a great deal of money, and

can't well do a man any real good. God Almighty could never have intended us to make chimneys of our mouths and noses. Does Fidus ever indulge in a weed?"

"He never indulges in anything," said Alaric.

"Except honesty," said the other, "and in that he is a beastly glutton. He gorges himself with it till all his faculties are overpowered and his mind becomes torpid. It's twice worse than drinking. I wonder whether he'll do a bit of speculation before he goes back to town."

"Who, Neverbend?—he never speculates!"

"Why not? Ah, my fine fellow, you don't know the world yet. Those sort of men, dull drones like Neverbend, are just the fellows who go the deepest. I'll be bound he will not go back to town without a few Mary Janes in his pocket-book. He'll be a fool if he does, I know."

"Why that's the very mine we are down here about."

"And that's the very reason why he'll purchase Mary Janes. He has an opportunity of knowing their value. Oh, let Neverbend alone. He is not so young as you are, my dear fellow."

“ Young or old, I think you mistake his character.”

“ Why, Tudor, what would you think now if he not only bought for himself, but was commissioned to buy by the very men who sent him down here ? ”

“ It would be hard to make me believe it.”

“ Ah ! faith is a beautiful thing ; what a pity that it never survives the thirtieth year ;—except with women and fools.”

“ And have you no faith, Scott ? ”

“ Yes—much in myself—some little in Lord Palmerston, that is, in his luck ; and a good deal in a bank-note. But I have none at all in Fidus Neverbend. What ! have faith in a man merely because he tells me to have it ! His method of obtaining it is far too easy.”

“ I trust neither his wit nor his judgment ; but I don’t believe him to be a thief.”

“ Thief ! I said nothing of thieves—he may, for aught I know, be just as good as the rest of the world ; all I say is, that I believe him to be no better. But come, we must go back to the Inn ; there is an ally of mine coming to me ; a perfect specimen of a sharp Cornish mining stock-jobber—as vulgar a fellow as you ever met,

and as shrewd. He won't stay very long, so you need not be afraid of him."

Alaric began to feel uneasy, and to think that there might by possibility be something in what Neverbend had said to him. He did not like the idea of meeting a Cornish stock-jobber in a familiar way over his brandy punch, while engaged, as he now was, on the part of Government; he felt that there might be impropriety in it, and he would have been glad to get off if he could. But he felt ashamed to break his engagement, and thus followed Undy into the hotel.

"Has Mr. Manylodes been here?" said Scott, as he walked up stairs.

"He's in the bar now, sir," said the waiter.

"Beg him to come up then. In the bar! why that man must have a bar within himself—the alcohol he consumes every day would be a tidy sale for a small public-house."

Up they went, and Mr. Manylodes was not long in following them. He was a small man, more like an American in appearance than an Englishman. He had on a common black hat, a black coat, black waistcoat, and black trousers, thick boots, a coloured shirt, and very dirty hands. Though every article he wore was good,

and most of them such as gentlemen wear, no man alive could have mistaken him for a gentleman. No man, conversant with the species to which he belonged, could have taken him for anything but what he was. As he entered the room a faint, sickly, second-hand smell of alcohol pervaded the atmosphere.

"Well, Manylodes," said Scott, "I'm glad to see you again. This is my friend, Mr. Tudor."

"Your servant, sir," said Manylodes, just touching his hat, without moving it from his head. "And how are you, Mr. Scott? I am glad to see you again in these parts, sir."

"And how's trade? Come, Tudor, what will you drink? Manylodes, I know, takes brandy; their sherry is vile, and their claret worse; maybe they may have a fairish glass of port. And how is trade, Manylodes?"

"We're all as brisk as bees at present. I never knew things sharper. If you've brought a little money with you, now's your time. But I tell you this, you'll find it sharp work for the eyesight."

"Quick's the word, I suppose."

"Lord love you! Quick! Why a fellow must shave himself before he goes to bed if he wants to be up in time these days."

"I suppose so."

"Lord love you! why there was old Sam Weazle, never caught napping yet—why at Truro, last Monday, he bought up to 450 New Friendships, and before he was abed they wern't worth, not this bottle of brandy. Well, old Sam was just bit by those Cambourne lads."

"And how did that happen?"

"Why, the New Friendships certainly was very good while they lasted; just for three months they was the thing, certainly. Why it came up, sir, as if there wern't no end of it, and just as clean as that half-crown—but I know'd there was an end coming."

"Water, I suppose," said Undy, sipping his toddy.

"Them clean takes, Mr. Scott, they never lasts; there was water, but that wern't the worst. Old Weazle knew of that; he calculated he'd back the metal agin the water, and so he bought all up he could lay his finger on. But the stuff was run out. Them Cambourne boys —what did they do? why, they let the water in on purpose. By Monday night old Weazle knew it all, and then you may say it was as good as a play."

"And how did you do in the matter?"

"Oh, I sold. I did very well—bought at £7. 2*s.* 3*d.* and sold at £6. 19*s.* 10*½d.*, and got my seven per cent. for the four months. But, Lord love you, them clean takes never lasts. I worn't going to hang on. Here's your health, Mr. Scott. Yours, Mr. ——, I didn't just catch the gen'leman's name ;" and, without waiting for further information on the point, he finished his brandy-and-water.

"So it's all up with the New Friendship, is it ?" said Undy.

"Up and down, Mr. Scott ; every dog has his day ; these Mary Janes will be going the same way some of them days. We're all mortal." And with this moral comparison between the uncertainty of human life and the vicissitudes of the shares in which he trafficked, Mr. Manylodes proceeded to put some more sugar and brandy into his tumbler.

"True, true—we are all mortal—Manylodes and Mary Janes ; old friendships and New Friendships ; while they last we must make the most we can of them ; buy them cheap and sell them dear ; and above all things get a good percentage."

"That's the game, Mr. Scott ; and I will say no man understands it better than yourself—

keep the ball a running—that's your maxim. Are you going it deep in Mary Jane, Mr. Scott?"

"Who? I! Oh no—she's a cut above me now, I fear. The shares are worth any money now, I suppose?"

"Worth any money! I think they are, Mr. Scott, but I believe——" and then bringing his chair close up to that of his aristocratic friend, resting his hands one on Mr. Scott's knee, and the other on his elbow, and breathing brandy into his ear, he whispered to him words of great significance.

"I'll leave you, Scott," said Alaric, who did not enjoy the society of Mr. Manylodes, and to whom the nature of the conversation was, in his present position, extremely irksome. "I must be back to the Bedford early."

"Early—why early? surely our honest friend can get himself to bed without your interference. Come, you don't like the brandy toddy, nor I either. We'll see what sort of a hand they are at making a bowl of bishop."

"Not for me, Scott."

"Yes, for you, man; surely you're not tied to that fellow's apron-strings," he said, removing himself from the close contiguity of Mr. Manylodes, and speaking under his voice; "take my

advice ; if you once let that man think you fear him, you'll never get the better of him."

Alaric allowed himself to be persuaded, and stayed.

" I have just ten words of business to say to this fellow," continued Scott, " and then we will be alone."

It was a lovely autumn evening, early in September, and Alaric sat himself at an open window, looking out from the back of the hotel on to the Brentor, with its singular parish-church built on its highest apex, while Undy held deep council with his friend of the mines. But from time to time, some word of moment found its way to Alaric's ears, and made him also unconsciously fix his mind on the *irritamenta malorum* which are dug from the bowels of the earth in those western regions.

" Minting money, sir ; it's just minting money. There's been no chance like it in my days. £4 12s. 6d. paid up ; and they'll be at £25 in Truro before sun sets on Saturday. Lord love you, Mr. Scott, now's your time. If, as I hear they ——" and then there was a very low whisper, and Alaric, who could not keep his eye altogether from Mr. Manylodes' countenance, saw plainly that that worthy gentleman was

talking of himself; and in spite of his better instincts, a desire came over him to know more of what they were discussing, and he could not keep from thinking that shares bought at £4 12*s.* 6*d.*, and realizing £25, must be very nice property.

"Well, I'll manage it ;" said Scott, still in a sort of whisper, but audibly enough for Alaric to hear. "Forty, you say? I'll take them at £5 1*s.* 1*d.*—very well ;" and he took out his pocket-book and made a memorandum. "Come, Tudor, here's the bishop. We have done our business, so now we'll enjoy ourselves. What, Manylodes, are you off?"

"Lord love you, Mr. Scott, I've a deal to do before I get to my downy ; and I don't like those doctored tipples. Good night, Mr. Scott; I wishes you good night, sir ;" and making another slight reference to his hat, which had not been removed from his head during the whole interview, Mr. Manylodes took himself off.

"There, now, is a specimen of a species of the *genus homo*, class Englishman, which is, I believe, known nowhere but in Cornwall."

"Cornwall and Devonshire, I suppose ;" said Alaric.

"No ; he is out of his true element here. If

you want to see him in all the glory of his native county, you should go west of Truro. From Truro to Hayle is the land of the Many-lodes. And a singular species it is. But, Tudor, you'll be surprised I suppose if I tell you that I have made a purchase for you."

"A purchase for me!"

"Yes; I could not very well consult you before that fellow, and yet as the chance came in my way, I did not like to lose it. Come, the bishop ain't so bad, is it; though it is doctored tipple?" and he refilled Alaric's glass.

"But what have you purchased for me, Scott?"

"Forty shares in the Mary Jane."

"Then you may undo the bargain again, for I don't want them, and shall not take them."

"You need not be a bit uneasy, my dear fellow. I've bought them at a little over £5, and they'll be salable to-morrow at double the money—or at any rate to-morrow week. But what's your objection to them?"

"In the first place, I've got no money to buy shares."

"That's just the reason why you should buy them; having no money, you can't but want some; and here's your way to make it. You can have no difficulty in raising £200."

"And in the next place, I should not think of buying mining shares, and more especially these, while I am engaged as I now am."

"Fal de ral, de ral, de ral! That's all very fine, Mr. Commissioner; only you mistake your man; you think you are talking to Mr. Neverbend."

"Well, Scott, I shan't have them."

"Just as you please, my dear fellow; there's no compulsion. Only mark this; the ball is at your foot now, but it won't remain there. 'There is a tide in the affairs of men,'—you know the rest; and you know also that 'tide and time wait for no man.' If you are contented with your two or three hundred a year in the Weights and Measures, God forbid that I should tempt you to higher thoughts—only in that case I have mistaken my man."

"I must be contented with it, if I can get nothing better," said Tudor, weakly.

"Exactly; you must be contented—or rather you must put up with it—if you can get nothing better. That's the meaning of contentment all the world over. You argue in a circle. You must be a mere clerk if you cannot do better than other mere clerks. But the fact of your having such an offer as that I now make you, is proof that

you can do better than others ; proves, in fact, that you need not be a mere clerk, unless you choose to remain so."

"Buying these shares might lose me all that I have got, and could not do more than put a hundred pounds or so in my pocket."

"Gammon——"

"Could I go back and tell Sir Gregory openly that I had bought them ? "

"Why, Tudor, you are the youngest fish I ever met, sent out to swim alone in this wicked world of ours. Who the deuce talks openly of his speculations ? Will Sir Gregory tell you what shares he buys ? Is not every member of the house, every man in the Government, every barrister, parson, and doctor, that can collect a hundred pounds, are not all of them at the work ? And do they talk openly of the matter ? Does the bishop put it into his charge, or the parson into his sermon ? "

"But they would not be ashamed to tell their friends.——"

"Would not they ? Oh ! the Rev. Mr. Pickabit, of St. Judas Without, would not be ashamed to tell his bishop ! But the long and the short of the thing is this ; most men circumstanced as you are have no chance of doing anything good

till they are forty or fifty, and then their energies are worn out. You have had tact enough to push yourself up early, and yet it seems you have not pluck enough to take the goods the Gods provide you."

"The Gods!—you mean the Devils rather," said Alaric, who sat listening, and drinking, almost unconsciously, his doctored tipple.

"Call them what you will for me. Fortune has generally been esteemed a goddess, but misfortune a very devil. But, Tudor, you don't know the world. Here is a chance in your way. Of course that keg of brandy who went out just now understands very well who you are. He wants to be civil to me, and he thinks it wise to be civil to you also. He has a hat full of these shares, and he tells me that, knowing my weakness, and presuming that you have the same, he bought a few extra this morning, thinking we might like them. Now, I have no hesitation in saying there is not a single man whom the Government could send down here, from Sir Gregory downwards, who would refuse the chance."

"I am quite sure that Neverbend——"

"Oh! for Heaven's sake don't choke me with Neverbend; the fools are fools, and will be so; they are used for their folly. I speak of men

with brains. How do you think that such men as Hardlines, Vigil, and Mr. Estimate have got up in the world? Would they be where they are now, had they been contented with their salaries?"

"They had private fortunes."

"Very private they must have been—I never heard of them. No; what fortunes they have, they made. Two of them are in Parliament, and the other has a Government situation of £2000 a year, with little or nothing to do; but they began life early, and never lost a chance."

"It is quite clear that that blackguard who was here just now thinks that he can influence my opinion by inducing me to have an interest in the matter."

"He had no such idea—nor have I. Do you think I would persuade you to such villainy? Do you think I do not know you too well? Of course the possession of these shares can have no possible effect on your report, and is not expected to have any. But when men like you and me become of any note in the world, others, such as Manylodes, like to know that we are embarked in the same speculation with themselves. Why are members of Parliament asked to be directors, and vice-governors, and presidents, and guardians, of all the

joint-stock societies that are now set agoing ? Not because of their capital, for they generally have none ; not for their votes, because one vote can be but of little use in any emergency. It is because the names of men of note are worth money. Men of note understand this, and enjoy the fat of the land accordingly. I want to see you among the number."

'Twas thus the devil pleaded for the soul of Alaric Tudor, and, alas ! he did not plead in vain. Let him but have a fair hearing, and he seldom does. 'Tis in this way that the truth of that awful mystery, the fall of man, comes home to us ; that we cannot hear the Devil plead, and resist the charm of his eloquence. To listen is to be lost. "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil!" Let that petition come forth from a man's heart, a true and earnest prayer, and he will be so led that he shall not hear the charmer let him charm never so wisely.

'Twas but a thin veil that the Hon. Undecimus Scott threw over the bait with which he fished for the honesty of Alaric Tudor, and yet it sufficed. One would say that a young man, fortified with such aspirations as those which glowed in Alaric's breast, should have stood a longer siege ; should have been able to look with clearer eye-

sight on the landmarks which divide honour from dishonour, integrity from fraud, and truth from falsehood. But he had never prayed to be delivered from evil. His desire had rather been that he might be led into temptation.

He had never so prayed—yet had he daily said his prayers at fitting intervals. On every returning Sunday had he gone through, with all the fitting forms, the ordinary worship of a Christian. Nor had he done this as a hypocrite. With due attention and a full belief he had weekly knelt at God's temple, and given, if not his mind, at least his heart, to the service of his church. But the inner truth of the prayer which he repeated so often had not come home to him. Alas! how many of us from week to week call ourselves worms and dust and miserable sinners, describe ourselves as chaff for the winds, grass for the burning, stubble for the plough, as dirt and filth fit only to be trodden under foot, and yet in all our doings before the world cannot bring home to ourselves the conviction that we require other guidance than our own!

Alaric Tudor had sighed for permission to go forth among worldlings and there fight the world's battle. Power, station, rank, wealth, all

the good things which men earn by tact, diligence, and fortune combined, and which were so far from him at his outset in life, became daily more dear to his heart. And now his honourable friend twitted him with being a mere clerk ! No, he was not, never had been, never would be such. Had he not already, in five or six short years, distanced his competitors, and made himself the favourite and friend of men infinitely above him in station ? Was he not now here in Tavistock on a mission which proved that he was no mere clerk ? Was not the fact of his drinking bishop in the familiar society of a lord's son, and an ex-M.P., a proof of it ?

It would be calumny on him to say that he had allowed Scott to make him tipsy on this occasion. He was far from being tipsy ; but yet the mixture which he had been drinking had told upon his brain.

“ But Undy,” said he—he had never before called his honourable friend by his Christian name—“ but Undy, if I take these shares, where am I to get the money to pay for them ? ”

“ The chances are you may part with them before you leave Tavistock. If so, you will not have to pay for them. You will only have to pocket the difference.”

"Or pay the loss."

"Or pay the loss. But there's no chance of that. I'll guarantee you against that."

"But I shan't like to sell them. I shan't choose to be trafficking in shares. Buying a few as an investment may, perhaps, be a different thing."

Oh, Alaric, Alaric, to what a pass had you conscience come, when it could be so silenced.

"Well, I suppose you can raise a couple of hundred—£205 will cover the whole thing, commission and all; but, mind, I don't advise you to keep them long—I shall take two months' dividends, and then sell."

"£205," said Tudor, to whom the sum seemed anything but trifling; "and when must it be paid?"

"Well, I can give Manylodes a cheque for the whole, dated this day week. You'll be back in town before that. We must allow him £5 for the accommodation. I suppose you can pay the money in at my banker's by that day."

Alaric had some portion of the amount himself, and he knew that Norman had money by him; he felt also a half-drunken conviction that if Norman failed him, Captain Cuttwater would not let him want such a sum; and so he

said that he could, and the bargain was completed.

As he went down stairs whistling with an affected ease, and a gaiety which he by no means felt, Undy Scott leant back in his chair, and began to speculate whether his new purchase was worth the purchase-money. "He's a sharp fellow, certainly, in some things, and may do well yet; but he's uncommonly green. That, however, will wear off. I should not be surprised if he told Neverbend the whole transaction before this time to-morrow." And then Mr. Scott finished his cigar and went to bed.

When Alaric entered the sitting-room at the Bedford, he found Neverbend still seated at a table covered with official books and huge bundles of official papers. An enormous report was open before him, from which he was culling the latent sweets, and extracting them with a pencil. He glowered at Alaric when he entered with a severe suspicious eye, which seemed to accuse him at once of the deed which he had done.

"You are very late," said Neverbend, "but I have not been sorry to be alone. I believe I have been able to embody in a rough draught, the various points which we have hitherto discussed. I have just been five hours and a half

at it," and Fidus looked at his watch, "five hours and forty minutes. To-morrow, perhaps, that is, if you are not going to your friend again, you'll not object to make a fair copy —"

"Copy!" shouted Alaric, in whose brain the open air had not diminished the effect of the bishop, and who remembered with all the energy of pot valour that he was not a mere clerk; "copy—bother—I'm going to bed, old fellow; and I advise you to do the same."

And then taking up a candlestick, and stumbling as he went somewhat awkwardly against a chair, Tudor went off to his room, waiting no further reply from his colleague.

Mr. Neverbend slowly put up his papers and followed him. "He is decidedly the worse for drink—decidedly so;" said he to himself, as he pulled off his clothes. "What a disgrace to the Woods and Works—what a disgrace!"

And he resolved in his mind that he would be very early at the pit's mouth. He would not be kept from his duty while a dissipated colleague collected his senses by the aid of soda water.

CHAPTER X.

WHEAL MARY JANE.

MR. MANYLODES was, at any rate right in this, that that beverage, which men call bishop, is a doctored tipple; and Alaric Tudor, when he woke in the morning, owned the truth. It had been arranged that certain denizens of the mine should meet the two Commissioners at the pit mouth at eight o'clock, and it had been settled at dinner-time that breakfast should be on the table at seven, sharp. Half an hour's quick driving would take them to the spot.

At seven Mr. Fidus Neverbend, who had never yet been known to be untrue to an appointment by the fraction of a second, was standing over the breakfast-table alone. He was alone, but not on that account unhappy. He could hardly disguise the pleasure with which he asked the waiter whether Mr. Tudor was yet dressed, or the triumph which he felt when he heard that his colleague was not *quite ready*.

"Bring the tea and the eggs at once," said Neverbend, very briskly.

"Won't you wait for Mr. Tudor?" asked the

waiter, with an air of surprise. Now the landlord, waiter, boots, and chambermaid, the chambermaid especially, had all, in Mr. Neverbend's estimation, paid Tudor by far too much consideration; and he was determined to show that he himself was first fiddle.

"Wait! no; quite out of the question—bring the hot water immediately—and tell the ostler to have the fly at the door at half-past seven exact."

"Yes, sir;" said the man, and disappeared.

Neverbend waited five minutes, and then rang the bell impetuously. "If you don't bring me my tea immediately, I shall send for Mr. Boteldale." Now Mr. Boteldale was the landlord.

"Mr. Tudor will be down in ten minutes," was the waiter's false reply; for up to that moment poor Alaric had not yet succeeded in lifting his throbbing head from his pillow. The boots was now with him administering soda-water and brandy, and he was pondering in his sickened mind whether, by a manful effort, he could rise and dress himself; or whether he would not throw himself backwards on his coveted bed, and allow Neverbend the triumph of descending alone to the nether world.

Neverbend nearly threw the loaf at the waiter's head. Wait ten minutes longer ! what right had that vile Devonshire napkin-twirler to make to him so base a proposition ? " Bring me my breakfast, sir," shouted Neverbend, in a voice that made the unfortunate sinner jump out of the room, as though he had been moved by a galvanic battery.

In five minutes, tea made with lukewarm water, and eggs that were not half boiled, were brought to the impatient Commissioner. As a rule Mr. Neverbend, when travelling on the public service, made a practice of enjoying his meals. It was the only solace which he allowed himself ; the only distraction from the cares of office which he permitted either to his body or his mind. But on this great occasion his country required that he should forget his comforts ; and he drank his tasteless tea, and ate his uncooked eggs, threatening the waiter as he did so with sundry pains and penalties, in the form of sixpences withheld.

" Is the fly there ?" said he, as he bolted a last morsel of cold roast beef.

" Coming, sir," said the waiter, as he disappeared round a corner.

In the meantime Alaric sat lackadaisical on

his bedside, all undressed, leaning his head upon his hand, and feeling that his struggle to dress himself was all but useless. The sympathetic boots stood by with a cup of tea—well-drawn comfortable tea—in his hand, and a small bit of dry toast lay near on an adjacent plate.

"Try a bit o' toast, sir," said boots.

"Ugh!" ejaculated poor Alaric.

"Have a leetle drop o' rum in the tea, sir, and it'll set you all to rights in two minutes."

The proposal made Alaric very sick, and nearly completed the catastrophe. "Ugh!" he said.

"There's the trap, sir, for Mr. Neverbend," said the boots, whose ears caught the well-known sound.

"The devil it is!" said Alaric, who was now stirred up to instant action. "Take my compliments to Mr. Neverbend, and tell him I'll thank him to wait ten minutes."

Boots, descending with the message, found Mr. Neverbend ready coated and gloved, standing at the hotel door. The fly was there, and the lame ostler holding the horse, but the provoking driver had gone back for his coat.

"Please, sir, Mr. Tudor says as how you're not to go just at present, but to wait ten minutes till he be ready."

Neverbend looked at the man, but he would not trust himself to speak. Wait ten minutes, and it now wanted five-and-twenty minutes to eight!—no—not for all the Tudors that ever sat upon the throne of England.

There he stood with his watch in his hand as the returning Jehu hurried round from the stable yard. “ You are now seven minutes late,” said he, “ and if you are not at the place by eight o’clock, I shall not give you one farthing.”

“ All right,” said Jehu. “ We’ll be at Mary Jane in less than no time;” and off they went, not at the quickest pace. But Neverbend’s heart beat high with triumph, as he reflected that he had carried the point on which he had been so intent.

Alaric, when he heard the wheels roll off, shook from him his lethargy. It was not only that Neverbend would boast that he alone had gone through the perils of their subterranean duty, but that doubtless he would explain in London how his colleague had been deterred from following him. It was a grievous task, that of dressing himself, as youthful sinners know but too well. Every now and then a qualm would come over him, and make the work seem all but impossible. Boots, however, stuck to him like a man, poured

cold water over his head, renewed his tea-cup, comforted him with assurances of the bracing air, and put a paper full of sandwiches in his pocket.

"For heaven's sake put them away," said Alaric, to whom the very idea of food was repulsive.

"You'll want 'em, sir, afore you are half way to Mary Jane; and it a'n't no joke going down and up again. I know what's what, sir."

The boots stuck to him like a man. He did not only get him sandwiches, but he procured for him also Mr. Boteldale's own fast-trotting pony, and just as Neverbend was rolling up to the pit's mouth fifteen minutes after his time, greatly resolving in his own mind to button his breeches pocket firmly against the recreant driver, Alaric started on his chase after him.

Mr. Neverbend had a presentiment that, sick as his friend might be, nauseous as doubtless were the qualms arising from yesterday's intemperance, he would make an attempt to recover his lost ground. He of the Woods and Works had begun to recognize the energy of him of the Weights and Measures, and felt that there was in it a force that would not easily be overcome, even by the fumes of bishop. But yet it would be a

great thing for the Woods and Works if he, Neverbend, could descend in this perilous journey to the deep bowels of the earth, leaving the Weights and Measures stranded in the upper air. This descent among the hidden riches of a lower world, this visit to the provocations of evils not yet dug out from their durable confinement, was the key-stone, as it were, of the whole mission. Let Neverbend descend alone, alone inspect the wonders of that dirty deep, and Tudor might then talk and write as he pleased. In such case all the world of the two public offices in question, and of some others cognate to them, would adjudge that he, Neverbend, had made himself master of the situation.

Actuated by these correct calculations, Mr. Neverbend was rather fussy to begin an immediate descent when he found himself on the spot. Two native gentlemen, who were to accompany the Commissioners, or the Commissioner as appeared likely to be the case, were already there, as were also the men who were to attend upon them.

It was an ugly uninviting place to look at, with but few visible signs of wealth. The earth, which had been burrowed out by these human rabbits in their search after tin, lay around in huge ungainly

heaps ; the overground buildings of the establishment consisted of a few ill-arranged sheds, already apparently in a state of decadence ; dirt and slush, and pools of water confined by muddy dams, abounded on every side ; muddy men, with muddy carts and muddy horses, slowly crawled hither and thither, apparently with no object, and evidently indifferent as to whom they might overset in their course. The inferior men seemed to show no respect to those above them, and the superiors to exercise no authority over those below them. There was a sullen equality among them all. On the ground around was no vegetation ; nothing green met the eye ; some few stunted bushes appeared here and there, nearly smothered by heaped-up mud, but they had about them none of the attractiveness of foliage. The whole scene, though consisting of earth alone, was unearthly, and looked as though the devil had walked over the place with hot hoofs, and then raked it with a huge rake.

“ I am afraid I am very late,” said Neverbend, getting out of his fly in all the haste he could muster, and looking at his watch the moment his foot touched the ground, “ very late, indeed, gentlemen ; I really must apologize, but it was the driver ; I was punctual to the minute, I was

indeed. But come, gentlemen, we won't lose another moment," and Mr. Neverbend stepped out as though he were ready at a instant's notice to plunge head foremost down the deepest shaft in all that region of mines.

"Oh, sir, there a'n't no cause of hurry whatsoever," said one of the mining authorities, "the day is long enough."

"Oh, but there is cause of hurry, Mr. Undersholt," said Neverbend, angrily, "great cause of hurry; we must do this work very thoroughly; and I positively have not time to get through all that I have before me."

"But a'n't the other gen'leman a coming?" said Mr. Undersholt.

"Surely Mr. Tooder isn't agoing to cry off," said the other. "Why, he was so hot about it yesterday."

"Mr. Tudor is not very well this morning," said Mr. Neverbend. "As his going down is not necessary for the inquiry, and is merely a matter of taste on his part, he has not joined me this morning. Come, gentlemen, are we ready?"

It was then for the first time explained to Mr. Neverbend that he had to go through a rather complicated adjustment of his toilet before he

would be considered fit to meet the infernal gods. He must, he was informed, envelope himself from head to foot in miners' habiliments, if he wished to save every stitch he had on him from dirt and destruction. He must also cover up his head with a linen cap, so constituted as to carry a lump of mud with a candle stuck in it, if he wished to save either his head from filth or his feet from falling. Now Mr. Neverbend, like most clerks in public offices, was somewhat particular about his wardrobe; it behoved him, as a gentleman frequenting the West End, to dress well, and it also behoved him to dress cheaply; he was, moreover, careful both as to his head and feet; he could not, therefore, reject the recommended precautions, but yet the time!—the time thus lost might destroy all.

He hurried into the shed where his toilet was to be made, and suffered himself to be prepared in the usual way. He took off his own great coat, and put on a muddy coarse linen jacket that covered the upper portion of his body completely; he then dragged on a pair of equally muddy overalls, and, lastly, submitted to a most uninviting cap, which came down over his ears, and nearly over his eyes, and on

the brow of which a lump of mud was then affixed, bearing a short tallow candle.

But though dressed thus in miners' garb, Mr. Neverbend could not be said to look the part he filled. He was a stout reddish-faced gentleman, with round shoulders and huge whiskers, he was nearly bald, and wore spectacles, and in the costume in which he now appeared he did not seem to be at his ease. Indeed, all his air of command, all his personal dignity and dictatorial tone, left him as soon as he found himself metamorphosed into a fat pseudo miner. He was like a cock whose feathers had been trailed through the mud, and who could no longer crow aloud, or claim the dunghill as his own. His appearance was somewhat that of a dirty dissipated cook who, having been turned out of one of the clubs for drunkenness, had been wandering about the streets all night. He began to wish that he was once more in the well-known neighbourhood of Charing Cross.

The adventure, however, must now be carried through. There was still enough of manhood in his heart to make him feel that he could not return to his colleague at Tavistock without seeing the wonders which he had come so far to see. When he reached the head of the shaft,

however, the affair did appear to him to be more terrible than he had before conceived. He was invited to get into a rough square bucket, in which there was just room for himself and another to stand; he was specially cautioned to keep his head straight and his hands and elbows from protruding, and then the windlass began to turn, and the upper world, the sunlight, and all humanity receded from his view.

The world receded from his view, but hardly soon enough; for as the windlass turned and the bucket descended, his last terrestrial glance, looking out among the heaps of mud, descried Alaric Tudor galloping on Mr. Boteldale's pony up to the very mouth of the mine.

“Facilis descensus Averni.” The bucket went down easy enough, and all too quick. The manner in which it grounded itself on the first landing grated discordantly on Mr. Neverbend's finer perceptibilities. But when he learnt, after the interchange of various hoarse and to him unintelligible bellowings, that he was to wait in that narrow damp lobby for the coming of his fellow Commissioner, the grating on his feelings was even more discordant. He had not pluck enough left to grumble; but he grunted his displeasure. He grunted, however, in vain; for

in about a quarter of an hour Alaric was close to him, shoulder to shoulder. He also wore a white jacket, &c., with a night-cap of mud, and candle on his head; but somehow he looked as though he had worn them all his life. The fast gallop, and the excitement of the masquerade which for him had charms the sterner Neverbend could not feel, had dissipated his sickness; and he was once more all himself.

"So I've caught you at the first stage," said he, good-humouredly; for though he knew how badly he had been treated, he was much too wise to show his knowledge. "It shall go hard but I'll distance you before we have done," he said to himself. Poor Neverbend only grunted.

And then they all went down a second stage in another bucket; and then a third in a third bucket; and then the business commenced. As far as this point passive courage alone had been required; to stand upright in a wooden tub and go down, and down, and down, was in itself easy enough, so long as the heart did not utterly faint. Mr. Neverbend's heart had grown faintish, but still he had persevered, and now stood on a third lobby, listening with dull unintelligent ears to eager questions asked by his colleague, and to the rapid answers of their mining

guides. Tudor was absolutely at work with paper and pencil, taking down notes in that wretched Pandemonium.

"There now, sir," said the guide; "no more of them ugly buckets, Mr. Neverbend; we can trust to our own arms and legs for the rest of it," and so saying, he pointed out to Mr. Neverbend's horror-stricken eyes a perpendicular iron ladder fixed firmly against the upright side of a shaft, and leading—for aught Mr. Neverbend could see—direct to hell itself.

"Down here, is it?" said Alaric, peeping over.

"I'll go first," said the guide; and down he went, down, down, down, till Neverbend looking over, could barely see the glimmer of his disappearing head light. Was it absolutely intended that he should disappear in the same way? Had he bound himself to go down that fiendish upright ladder? And were he to go down it, what then? Would it be possible that a man of his weight should ever come up again?

"Shall it be you or I next?" said Alaric, very civilly. Neverbend could only pant and grunt, and Alaric, with a courteous nod, placed himself on the ladder, and went down, down, down, till of him also nothing was left but the faintest glimmer. Mr. Neverbend remained above with

one of the mining authorities ; one attendant miner also remained with them.

"Now, sir," said the authority, "if you are ready, the ladder is quite free."

Free ! What would not Neverbend have given to be free also himself ! He looked down the free ladder, and the very look made him sink. It seemed to him as though nothing but a spider could creep down that perpendicular abyss. And then a sound, slow, sharp, and continuous, as of drops falling through infinite space on to deep water, came upon his ear ; and he saw that the sides of the abyss were covered with slime ; and the damp air made him cough, and the cap had got over his spectacles and nearly blinded him ; and he was perspiring with a cold, clammy sweat.

"Well, sir, shall we be going on ?" said the authority. "Mr. Tooder 'll be at the foot of the next set before this."

Mr. Neverbend wished that Mr. Tudor's journey might still be down, and down, and down, till he reached the globe's centre, in which conflicting attractions might keep him for ever fixed. In his despair he assayed to put one foot upon the ladder, and then looked piteously up to the guide's face. Even in that dark, dingy atmo-

sphere, the light of the farthing candle on his head revealed the agony of his heart. His companions, though they were miners, were still men. They saw his misery, and relented.

“ Maybe thee be afeard ? ” said the working miner ; “ and if so be thee be’est, thee’d better bide.”

“ I am sure I should never come up again,” said Neverbend, with a voice pleading for mercy, but with all the submission of one prepared to suffer without resistance if mercy should not be forthcoming.”

“ Thee bee’st for sartan too thick and weazy like for them stairs,” said the miner.

“ I am, I am,” said Neverbend, turning on the man a look of the warmest affection, and shoving the horrid, heavy, encumbered cap from off his spectacles ; “ yes, I am too fat.” How would he have answered, with what aspect would he have annihilated the sinner, had such a man dared to call him weazy up above, on *terra firma*, under the canopy of heaven ?

His troubles, however, or at any rate his dangers, were brought to an end. As soon as it became plainly manifest that his zeal in the public service would carry him no lower, and would hardly suffice to keep life throbbing in his bosom

much longer, even in his present level, preparations were made for his ascent. A bell was rung ; hoarse voices were again heard speaking and answering in sounds quite unintelligible to a Cockney's ears ; chains rattled, the windlass whirled, and the huge bucket came tumbling down, nearly on their heads. Poor Neverbend was all but lifted into it. Where now was all the pride of the morn that had seen him go forth the great dictator of the mines ? Where was that towering spirit with which he had ordered his tea and toast, and rebuked the slowness of his charioteer ? Where the ambition that had soared so high over the pet of Weights and Measures ? Alas, alas ! how few of us there are who have within us the courage to be great in adversity. “ *Aquam memento—!* ” &c. if thou couldst but have thought of it, O Neverbend, who need’st must some day die.

But Neverbend did not think of it. How few of us do remember such lessons at those moments in which they ought to be of use to us. He was all but lifted into the tub, and then out of it, and then again into another, till he reached the upper world, a sight piteous to behold. His spectacles had gone from him, his cap covered his eyes, his lamp had reversed itself and soft

globules of grease had fallen on his nose, he was bathed in perspiration and was nevertheless chilled through to his very bones, his whiskers were fringed with mud, and his black cravat had been pulled from his neck and lost in some infernal struggle. Nevertheless, the moment in which he seated himself on a hard stool in that rough shed, was perhaps the happiest in his life ; some Christian brought him beer ; had it been nectar from the brewery of the gods, he could not have drank it with greater avidity.

By slow degrees he made such toilet as circumstances allowed, and then had himself driven back to Tavistock, being no more willing to wait for Tudor now than he had been in the early morning. But Jehu found him much more reasonable on his return ; and as that respectable functionary pocketed his half-crown, he fully understood the spirit in which it was given. Poor Neverbend had not now enough pluck left in him to combat the hostility of a postboy.

Alaric, who of course contrived to see all that was to be seen, and learn all that was to be learnt, in the dark passages of the tin mine, was careful on his return to use his triumph with the greatest moderation. His conscience was, alas,

burdened with the guilty knowledge of Undy's shares. When he came to think of the transaction as he rode leisurely back to Tavistock, he knew how wrong he had been, and yet he felt a kind of triumph at the spoil which he held; for he had heard among the miners that the shares of Mary Jane were already going up to some incredible standard of value. In this manner, so said he to himself, had all the great minds of the present day made their money, and kept themselves afloat. 'Twas thus he tried to comfort himself; but not as yet successfully.

There were no more squabbles between Mr. Neverbend and Mr. Tudor; each knew that of himself which made him bear and forbear; and so the two Commissioners returned to town on good terms with each other, and Alaric wrote a report which delighted the heart of Sir Gregory Hardlines, ruined the opponents of the great tin mine, and sent the Mary Jane shares up, and up, and up, till speculating men thought that they could not give too high a price to secure them.

Alaric returned to town on Friday. It had been arranged that he and Charley and Norman should all go down to Hampton on the Saturday; and then, on the following week, the competitive examination was to take place. But Alaric's

first anxiety after his return was to procure the £205 which he had to pay for the shares which he held in his pocket-book. He all but regretted as he journeyed up to town, with the now tame Fidus seated opposite to him, that he had not disposed of them at Tavistock even at half their present value, so that he might have saved himself the necessity of being a borrower, and have wiped his hands of the whole affair. But he had not seen Undy since the evening of the bishop, and he had known no one else in the place to whom he would have chosen to confide the secret. He was thus constrained to carry them with him to London ; and even when there was ignorant how to dispose of them, unless through the agency of Scott, so innocent was he at that time of the doings of the great world.

He had, however, promised that the money should be paid into Undy's bank on the Saturday morning, and that promise he was bound to keep. He called at Scott's lodgings and club on the Friday evening, but found that he was not in town ; he had, therefore, no resource but to go to Norman.

They dined together at their club in Waterloo Place, the Pythagorean, a much humbler establishment than that patronized by Scott, and one

that was dignified by no politics. After dinner, as they sat over their pint of sherry, Alaric made his request.

"Harry," said he, suddenly, "you are always full of money—I want you to lend me £150."

Norman was much less quick in his mode of speaking than his friend, and at the present moment was inclined to be somewhat slower than usual. This affair of the examination pressed upon his spirits, and made him dull and unhappy. During the whole of dinner he had said little or nothing, and had since been sitting listlessly gazing at vacancy, and balancing himself on the hind-legs of his chair.

"Oh, yes—certainly," said he; but he said it without the eagerness with which Alaric thought that he should have answered his request.

"If it's inconvenient; or if you don't like it," said Alaric, the blood mounting to his forehead, "it does not signify. I can do without it."

"I can lend it you without any inconvenience," said Harry. "When do you want it? not to-night, I suppose."

"No—not to-night—I should like to have it early to-morrow morning; but I see you don't like it, so I'll manage it some other way."

"I don't know what you mean by not liking

it. I have not the slightest objection to lending you any money I can spare. I don't think you'll find any other of your friends who will like it better. You can have it by eleven o'clock to-morrow."

Intimate as the two men were, there had hitherto been very little borrowing or lending between them ; and now Alaric felt as though he owed it to his intimacy with his friend to explain to him why he wanted so large a sum in so short a time. He felt, moreover, that he would not himself be so much ashamed of what he had done if he could confess it to some one else. He could then solace himself with the reflection that he had done nothing secret. Norman, he supposed, would be displeased ; but then Norman's displeasure could not injure him, and with Norman there would be no danger that the affair would go any further.

" You must think it very strange," said he, " that I should want such a sum ; but the truth is I have bought some shares."

" Railway shares ?" said Norman, in a tone that certainly did not signify approval. He disliked speculation altogether, and had an old-fashioned idea that men who do speculate, should have money wherewith to do it.

"No—not railway shares, exactly."

"Canal?" suggested Norman.

"No—not canal."

"Gas?"

"Mines," said Alaric, bringing out the dread truth at last.

Harry Norman's brow grew very black. "Not that mine that you've been down about, I hope," said he.

"Yes—that very identical Mary Jane that I went down, and down about," said Alaric, trying to joke on the subject. "Don't look so very black, my dear fellow. I know all that you have to say upon the matter. I did what was very foolish, I dare say; but the idea never occurred to me till it was too late, that I might be suspected of making a false report on the subject, because I had embarked a hundred pounds in it."

"Alaric, if it were known——"

"Then it mustn't be known," said Tudor. "I am sorry for it; but, as I told you, the idea didn't occur to me till it was too late. The shares are bought now and must be paid for to-morrow. I shall sell them the moment I can, and you shall have the money in three or four days."

"I don't care one straw about the money," said Norman, now quick enough, but still in great displeasure. "I would give double the amount that you had not done this."

"Don't be so suspicious, Harry," said the other—"don't try to think the worst of your friend. By others, by Sir Gregory Hardlines, Neverbend, and such men, I might expect to be judged harshly in such a matter. But I have a right to expect that you will believe me. I tell you that I did this inadvertently, and am sorry for it; surely that ought to be sufficient."

Norman said nothing more; but he felt that Tudor had done that which, if known, would disgrace him for ever. It might, however, very probably never be known; and it might also be that Tudor would never act so dishonestly again. On the following morning the money was paid; and in the course of the next week the shares were re-sold and the money repaid, and Alaric Tudor, for the first time in his life, found himself to be the possessor of over three hundred pounds.

Such was the price which Scott, Manylodes and Co., had found it worth their while to pay him for his good report on Mary Jane.

CHAPTER XI.

THE THREE KINGS.

AND now came the all-important week. On the Saturday the three young men went down to Hampton. Charley had lately been leading a very mixed sort of life. One week he would consort mainly with the houri of the Norfolk Street beer-shop, and the next he would be on his good behaviour, and live as respectably as circumstances permitted him to do. His scope in this respect was not large. The greatest respectability which his unassisted efforts could possibly achieve was to dine at a cheap eating-house and spend his evenings at a cigar divan. He belonged to no club, and his circle of friends, except in the houri and navvy line, was very limited. Who could expect that a young man from the Internal Navigation would sit for hours and hours alone in a dull London lodging, over his book and tea-cup? Who should expect that any young man will do so? And yet mothers, and aunts, and anxious friends, do expect it—very much in vain.

During Alaric's absence at Tavistock, Norman had taken Charley by the hand and been with him a good deal. He had therefore spent an uncommonly respectable week, and the Norfolk Street houri would have been *au désespoir*, but that she had other Charleys to her bow. When he found himself getting into a first-class carriage at the Waterloo-bridge station with his two comrades, he began to appreciate the comfort of decency, and almost wished that he also had been brought up among the stern morals and hard work of the Weights and Measures.

Nothing special occurred at Surbiton Cottage. It might have been evident to a watchful bystander that Alaric was growing in favour with all the party, excepting Mrs. Woodward, and that, as he did so, Harry was more and more cherished by her.

This was specially shown in one little scene. Alaric had brought down with him to Hampton the documents necessary to enable him to draw out his report on Mary Jane. Indeed, it was all but necessary that he should so, as his coming examination would leave him but little time for other business during the week. On Saturday night he sat up at his inn over the papers, and on Sunday morning, when Mrs. Woodward

and the girls came down, ready bonneted, for church, he signified his intention of remaining at his work.

"I certainly think he might have gone to church," said Mrs. Woodward when the hall-door closed behind the party, as they started to their place of worship.

"Oh! mama, think how much he has to do," said Gertrude.

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Woodward; "it's all affectation, and he ought to go to church. Government clerks are not worked so hard as all that; are they, Harry?"

"Alarie is certainly very busy, but I think he should go to church all the same," said Harry, who himself never omitted divine worship.

"But surely this is a work of necessity," said Linda.

"Fiddle-de-dee," said Mrs. Woodward; "I hate affectation, my dear. It's very grand, I dare say, for a young man's services to be in such request that he cannot find time to say his prayers. He'll find plenty of time for gossiping, by-and-by, I don't doubt."

Linda could say nothing further, for an unbidden tear moistened her eye-lid as she heard her mother speak so harshly of her lover. Ger-

trude, however, took up the cudgels for him, and so did Captain Cuttwater.

"I think you are a little hard upon him, mama," said Gertrude, "particularly when you know that, as a rule, he always goes to church. I have heard you say yourself what an excellent churchman he is."

"Young men change sometimes," said Mrs. Woodward.

"Upon my word, Bessy, I think you are very uncharitable this fine Sunday morning," said the captain. "I wonder how you'll feel if we have that chapter about the beam and the mote."

Mrs. Woodward did not quite like being scolded by her uncle before her daughters, but she said nothing further. Katie, however, looked daggers at the old man from out her big bright eyes. What right had any man, were he ever so old, ever so much an uncle, to scold her mama? Katie was inclined to join her mother and take Harry Norman's side, for it was Harry Norman who owned the boat.

They were now at the church door, and they entered without saying anything further. Let us hope that charity, which surpasseth all other virtues, guided their prayers while they were

there, and filled their hearts. In the meantime Alaric, unconscious how he had been attacked and how defended, worked hard at his Tavistock notes.

Mrs. Woodward was quite right in this, that the Commissioner of the mines, though he was unable to find time to go to church, did find time to saunter about with the girls before dinner. Was it to be expected that he should not do so? for what other purpose was he there at Hampton?

They were all very serious this Sunday afternoon, and Katie could make nothing of them. She and Charley, indeed, went off by themselves to a desert island, or a place that would have been a desert island had the water run round it, and there built stupendous palaces and laid out glorious gardens. Charley was the most good-natured of men, and could he have only brought a boat with him, as Harry so often did, he would soon have been first favourite with Katie.

"It shan't be at all like Hampton Court," said Katie, speaking of the new abode which Charley was to build for her.

"Not at all," said Charley.

"Nor yet Buckingham Palace."

"No," said Charley, "I think we'll have it Gothic."

"Gothic!" said Katie, looking up at him with all her eyes. "Will Gothic be most grand? What's Gothic?"

Charley began to consider. "Westminster Abbey," said he at last.

"Oh—but Charley, I don't want a church. Is the Alhambra Gothic?"

Charley was not quite sure, but thought it probably was. They decided, therefore, that the new palace should be built after the model of the Alhambra.

The afternoon was but dull and lugubrious to the remainder of the party. The girls seemed to feel that there was something solemn about the coming competition between two such dear friends, which prevented and should prevent them all from being merry. Harry perfectly sympathised in the feeling; and even Alaric, though depressed himself by no melancholy forebodings, was at any rate conscious that he should refrain from any apparent anticipation of a triumph. They all went to church in the evening; but even this amendment in Alaric's conduct hardly reconciled him to Mrs. Woodward.

"I suppose we shall all be very clever before long," said she, after tea; "but really I don't know that we shall be any the better for it. Now

in this office of yours, by the end of next week, there will be three or four men with broken hearts, and there will be one triumphant jackanapes, so conceited and proud that he'll never bring himself to do another good ordinary day's work as long as he lives. Nothing will persuade me but that it is not only very bad, but very unjust also."

"The jackanapes must learn to put up with ordinary work," said Alaric, "or he'll soon find himself reduced to his former insignificance."

"And the men with the broken hearts; they, I suppose, must put up with their wretchedness too," said Mrs. Woodward; "and their wives, also, and children, who have been looking forward for years to this vacancy as the period of their lives at which they are to begin to be comfortable. I hate such heartlessness. I hate the very name of Sir Gregory Hardlines."

"But, mama, won't the general effect be to produce a much higher class of education among the men?" said Gertrude.

"In the army and navy the best men get on the best," said Linda.

"Do they, by jingo!" said Uncle Bat. "It's very little you know about the navy, Miss Linda."

"Well, then, at any rate they ought," said Linda.

"I would have a competitive examination in every service," said Gertrude. "It would make young men ambitious. They would not be so idle and empty as they now are, if they had to contend in this way for every step upwards in the world."

"The world," said Mrs. Woodward, "will soon be like a fish pond, very full of fish, but with very little food for them. Every one is scrambling for the other's prey, and they will end at last by eating one another. If Harry gets this situation, will not that unfortunate Jones, who for years has been waiting for it, always regard him as a robber?"

"My maxim is this," said Uncle Bat; "if a youngster goes into any service, say the navy, and does his duty by his country like a man, why, he shouldn't be passed over. Now look at me; I was on the books of the Catamaran, one of the old seventy-fours, in '96; I did my duty then and always; was never in the black book or laid up sick; was always rough and ready for any work that came to hand; and when I went into the Mudlark as lieutenant in the year '9, little Bobby Howard had just joined the old Cat as a

young middy. And where am I now? and where is Bobby Howard? Why, d—e, I'm on the shelf, craving the ladies' pardon, and he's a Lord of the Admiralty, if you please, and a Member of Parliament. Now I say Cuttwater's as good a name as Howard, for going to sea with, any day; and if there'd been a competitive examination for Admiralty Lords five years ago, Bobby Howard would never have been where he is now, and somebody else who knows more about his profession than all the Howards put together, might perhaps have been in his place. And so, my lads, here's to you, and I hope the best man will win."

Whether Uncle Bat agreed with his niece or with his grand-nieces, was not very apparent from the line of his argument; but they all laughed at his eagerness, and nothing more was said that evening about the matter.

Alaric Harry and Charley, of course returned to town on the following day. Breakfast on Monday morning at Surbiton Cottage was an early affair when the young men were there; so early, that Captain Cuttwater did not make his appearance. Since his arrival at the cottage, Mrs. Woodward had found an excuse for a later breakfast in the necessity of taking it with her uncle; so that the young people were generally

left alone. Linda was the family tea-maker, and was, therefore, earliest down; and Alaric being the first on this morning to leave the hotel, found her alone in the dining-room.

He had never renewed the disclosure of his passion; but Linda had thought that whenever he shook hands with her since that memorable walk, she had always felt a more than ordinary pressure. This she had been careful not to return, but she had not the heart to rebuke it. Now, when he bade her good morning, he certainly held her hand in his longer than he need have done. He looked at her too, as though his looks meant something more than ordinary looking; at least so Linda thought; but yet he said nothing, and so Linda, slightly trembling, went on with the adjustment of her tea-tray.

"It will be all over, Linda, when we meet again," said Alaric. His mind she found was intent on his examination, not on his love. But this was natural, was as it should be. If—and she was certain in her heart that it would be so—if he should be successful, then he might speak of love without having to speak in the same breath of poverty as well. "It will be all over when we meet again," he said.

"I suppose it will," said Linda.

"I don't at all like it; it seems so unnatural having to contend against one's friend. And yet one cannot help it; one cannot allow one's self to go to the wall."

"I am sure Harry doesn't mind it," said Linda.

"I am sure I do," said he. "If I fail I shall be unhappy, and if I succeed I shall be equally so. I shall set all the world against me. I know what your mother meant when she talked of a jackanapes yesterday. If I get the promotion, I may wish good bye to Surbiton Cottage."

"Oh, Alaric!"

"Harry would forgive me; but Harry's friends would never do so."

"How can you say so? I am sure mama has no such feeling, nor yet even Gertrude; I mean that none of us have."

"It is very natural all of you should, for he is your cousin."

"You are just the same as our cousin. I am sure we think quite as much of you as of Harry. Even Gertrude said she hoped that you would get it."

"Dear Gertrude!"

"Because you know Harry does not want it so much as you do. I am sure I wish you suc-

cess with all my heart. Perhaps it's wicked to wish for either of you over the other ; but you can't both get it at once, you know."

At this moment Katie came in, and soon afterwards Gertrude, and the two other young men, and so nothing further was said on the subject.

Charley parted with the competitors at the corner of Waterloo Bridge. He turned into Somerset House, being there regarded on these Monday mornings as a prodigy of punctuality ; and Alaric and Harry walked back along the Strand, arm-in-arm, toward their own office.

" Well, lads, I hope you'll both win," said Charley. " And whichever wins most, why of course he'll stand an uncommon good dinner."

" Oh ! that's of course," said Alaric. " We'll have it at the Trafalgar."

They walked on, arm-in-arm, to the Weights and Measures ; but they hardly spoke to each other as they went. Harry could not bring himself to have a kindly feeling for his friend, and Alaric by some instinctive sympathy knew that this was the case. Norman appeared to the world to be a colder man than Alaric Tudor ; but, of the two, his feelings were in truth much the warmer and much the deeper. During the whole week that Alaric had been absent in De-

vonshire, he had been schooling himself to accept the expected success of his friend and rival as a triumph in which, though beaten, he himself might in part join. He had all but brought himself to resolve to retire from the struggle, and had determined to do so if he could learn from the great men of the office that Alaric was likely to distance his other competitors in the struggle. He would do more than Nisus did, and, if possible, make the running sure for his Euryalus, even at his own expense.

'Twas thus he thought of the matter when alone ; but yet when he found himself in Alaric's company he could not bring himself to be genial. With him Alaric was always good-humoured ; but he was indifferent as well as good-humoured. Had he lost his temper, been perverse, petulant, or overbearing, or even had he shown any intense anxiety as to his promotion, Norman could have borne it and sympathised with him. But he never did so. If Norman spoke good-humouredly to him, he answered in the same strain ; if Norman was silent, he left him in his silence ; if apparently sullen, he bore that with equal placidity. Norman in fact felt, though he could ill have defined his own feelings, that his friend had used him, and was now about to pass him

in the struggle of life, and then leave him behind when he could be of no further service.

Other thoughts also troubled him. He could not banish from his mind the unhappy purchase of those Tavistock shares. Alaric had told him that he should undoubtedly make money by the speculation, and he could not but look on money so made as foully come by. Alaric had accused him of being harsh in his judgment, and he therefore had said nothing further; but he could not help feeling that his chosen friend, the friend of whom he wished to think so well, had disgraced himself.

And then when he thought of Gertrude and Surbiton Cottage, he could not bring himself to be happy. He was not jealous of Alaric, whom he had fully trusted with the secret of his love; nor was he doubtful of Gertrude, though he had sufficient reason to be, had he known aught of a woman's heart. But he felt that he was forced to play second fiddle before his lady love; and it was Harry Norman's misfortune that though doomed to play second fiddle through life, he could not reconcile himself to that place in the world's orchestra.

Alaric the while thought of nothing but his triumphs, past, present, and to come. He had

thoroughly vanquished Neverbend, and had received honour and glory in doing so ; he had the sure prospect of netting two or three hundred pounds, and he had full confidence in himself in facing Sir Gregory Hardlines' Board of Examiners. The ball was at his foot, and he meant to keep it moving ; the flood time of his tide had come, and he would not let the waters ebb without using them. His friend Scott had asked him whether he meant to be a mere clerk ; and he had often since answered the question to himself, fully to his own satisfaction.

And so the two walked on together, arm-in-arm, to the Weights and Measures.

The ceremony which was now about to take place at the Weights and Measures was ordained to be the first of those examinations which under the auspices of Sir Gregory Hardlines were destined to revivify, clarify, and render perfect the Civil Service of the country. It was a great triumph to Sir Gregory to see the darling object of his heart thus commencing its existence in the very cradle in which he, as an infant Hercules, had made his first exertions in the cause. It was to be his future fortune to superintend these intellectual contests in a stately office of his own, duly set apart and appointed for the purpose.

But the throne on which he was to sit had not yet been prepared for him, and he was at present constrained to content himself with exercising his power, now here and now there, according as his services might be required, carrying the appurtenances of his royalty about with him.

But Sir Gregory was not a solitary monarch. In days long gone by, there were, as we all know, three kings at Cologne, and again three kings at Brentford. So also were there three kings at the Civil Service Examination Board. But of these three Sir Gregory was by far the greatest king. He sat in the middle, had two thousand jewels to his crown, whereas the others had only twelve hundred each, and his name ran first in all the royal warrants. Nevertheless Sir Gregory, could he have had it so, would, like most other kings, have preferred an undivided sceptre.

Of his co-mates on the throne the elder in rank was a west country Baronet, who, not content with fatting beeves and brewing beer like his sires, aspired to do something for his country. Sir Warwick Westend was an excellent man, full of the best intentions, and not more than decently anxious to get the good things of Government into his hand. He was, perhaps, rather too much inclined to think that he could see

further through a millstone than another, and had a way of looking as though he were always making the attempt. He was a man born to grace, if not his country, at any rate his county; and his conduct was uniformly such as to afford the liveliest satisfaction to his uncles, aunts, and relations in general. If as a king he had a fault, it was this, that he allowed that other king, Sir Gregory, to carry him in his pocket.

But Sir Gregory could not at all get the third king into his pocket. This gentleman was a worthy clergyman from Cambridge, one Mr. Jobbles by name. Mr. Jobbles had for many years been examining undergraduates for little goes, and great goes, and had passed his life in putting posing questions, in detecting ignorance by *vivā voce* scrutiny, and eliciting learning by printed papers. He, by a stupendous effort of his mathematical mind, had divided the adult British male world into classes and sub-classes, and could tell at a moment's notice how long it would take him to examine them all. His soul panted for the work. Every man should, he thought, be made to pass through some 'go.' The green-grocer's boy should not carry out cabbage unless his fitness for cabbage-carrying had been ascertained, and till it had also been ascertained that

no other boy, ambitious of the preferment, would carry them better. Difficulty! There was no difficulty. Could not he, Jobbles, get through 5,000 *vivā voce*s in every five hours—that is, with due assistance? and would not 55,000 printed papers, containing 555,000 questions, be getting themselves answered at the same time, with more or less precision?

So now Mr. Jobbles was about to try his huge plan by a small commencement.

On the present occasion the examination was actually to be carried on by two of the kings in person. Sir Gregory had declared that as so large a portion of his heart and affections was bound up with the gentlemen of the Weights and Measures, he could not bring himself actually to ask questions of them and then to listen to or read their answers. Should any of his loved ones make some fatal *fauw pas*, his tears, like those of the recording angel, would blot out the error. His eye would refuse to see faults, if there should be faults, in those whom he himself had nurtured. Therefore, though he came with his colleagues to the Weights and Measures, he did not himself take part in the examination.

At 11 o'clock the Board-room was opened, and the candidates walked in and seated them-

selves. Fear of Sir Gregory, and other causes, had thinned the number. Poor Jones ! who by right of seniority should have had the prize, declined to put himself in competition with his juniors, and in lieu thereof sent up to the Lords of the Treasury an awful memorial spread over fifteen folio pages—very uselessly. The Lords of the Treasury referred it to the three kings, whose secretary put a minute upon it. Sir Gregory signed the minute, and some gentlemen at the Treasury wrote a short letter to Mr. Jones, apprising that unhappy gentleman, that my Lords had taken the matter into their fullest consideration, and that nothing could be done to help him. Had Jones been consulted by any other disappointed Civil Service Werter as to the expediency of complaining to the Treasury Lords, Jones would have told him exactly what would be the result. The disappointed one, however, always thinks that all the Treasury Lords will give all their ears to him, though they are deafer than Icarus to the world beside.

Robinson stood his ground like a man ; but Brown found out, a day or two before the struggle came, that he could not bring himself to stand against his friend. Jones, he said, he knew was incompetent, but Robinson ought to get it ; so he, for one, would not stand in Robinson's way.

Uppinall was there, as confident as a bantam cock ; and so was Alphabet Precis, who had declared to all his friends that if the pure well of official English undefiled was to count for anything, he ought to be pretty safe. But poor Minusex was ill, and sent a certificate. He had so crammed himself with unknown quantities, that his mind—like a gourmand's stomach —had broke down under the effort, and he was now sobbing out algebraic positions under his counterpane.

Norman and Alaric made up the five who still had health, strength, and pluck to face the stern justice of the new kings ; and they accordingly took their seats on five chairs, equally distant, placing themselves in due order of seniority.

And then, first of all, Sir Gregory made a little speech, standing up at the head of the Board-room table, with an attendant king on either hand, and the Secretary, and two Assistant-Secretaries, standing near him. Was not this a proud moment for Sir Gregory ?

“ It had now become his duty,” he said, “ to take his position in that room, that well-known, well-loved room, under circumstances of which he had little dreamt when he first entered it with awe-struck steps, in the days of his early youth. But, nevertheless, even then ambition had warmed

him. That ambition had been to devote every energy of his mind, every muscle of his body, every hour of his life, to the Civil Service of his country. It was not much, perhaps, that he had been able to do; he could not boast of those acute powers of mind, of that gigantic grasp of intellect, of which they saw in those days so wonderful an example in a high place." Sir Gregory here gratefully alluded to that statesman who had given him his present appointment. "But still he had devoted all his mind, such as it was, and every hour of his life, to the service; and now he had his reward. If he might be allowed to give advice to the gentlemen now before him, gentlemen of whose admirable qualifications for the Civil Service of the country he himself was so well aware, his advice should be this—That they should look on none of their energies as applicable to private purposes, regard none of their hours as their own. They were devoted in a peculiar way to the Civil Service, and they should feel that such was their lot in life. They should know that their intellects were a sacred pledge entrusted to them for the good of that service, and should use them accordingly. This should be their highest ambition. And what higher ambition," asked Sir Gregory, "could they have? They all, alas! knew that

the service had been disgraced in other quarters by idleness, incompetency, and, he feared he must say, dishonesty; till incompetency and dishonesty had become, not the exception, but the rule. It was too notorious that the Civil Service was filled by the family fools of the aristocracy and middle classes, and that any family who had no fool to send, sent in lieu thereof some invalid past hope. Thus the service had become a hospital for incurables and idiots. It was " said Sir Gregory, " for him and them to cure all that. He would not," he said, " at that moment, say anything with reference to salaries. It was, as they were all aware, a very difficult subject, and did not seem to be necessarily connected with the few remarks which the present opportunity had seemed to him to call for." He then told them they were all his beloved children; that they were a credit to the establishment; that he handed them over without a blush to his excellent colleagues, Sir Warwick Westend and Mr. Jobbles, and that he wished in his heart that each of them could be successful. And, having so spoken, Sir Gregory went his way.

It was beautiful then to see how Mr. Jobbles swam down the long room and handed out his examination papers to the different candidates as

he passed them. 'Twas a pity there should have been but five ; the man did it so well, so quickly, with such a gusto ! He should have been allowed to try his hand upon five hundred instead of five. His step was so rapid, and his hand and arm moved so dexterously, that no conceivable number would have been too many for him. But, even with five, he showed at once that the right man was in the right place. Mr. Jobbles was created for the conducting of examinations.

And then the five candidates who had hitherto been all ears, of a sudden became all eyes, and devoted themselves in a manner which would have been delightful to Sir Gregory, to the papers before them. Sir Warwick, in the meantime, was seated in his chair, hard at work looking through his millstone.

It is a dreadful task that of answering examination papers—only to be exceeded in dreadfulness by the horrors of Mr. Jobbles' *vivā voce* torments. A man has before him a string of questions, and he looks painfully down them, from question to question, searching for some allusion to that special knowledge which he has within him. He too often finds that no such allusion is made. It appears that the Jobbles of the occasion has exactly known the blank spots of his mind and fitted

them all. He has perhaps crammed himself with the winds and tides, and there is no more reference to those stormy subjects than if luna was extinct; but he has, unfortunately, been loose about his botany, and question after question would appear to him to have been dictated by Sir Joseph Paxton or the head gardener at Kew. And then to his own blank face and puzzled look is opposed the fast scribbling of some botanic candidate, fast as though reams of folio could hardly contain all the knowledge which he is able to pour forth.

And so with a mixture of fast scribbling pens and blank faces, our five friends went to work. The examination lasted for four days, and it was arranged that on each of the four days each of the five candidates should be called up to undergo a certain quantum of Mr. Jobbles' *vivā voce*. This part of his duty Mr. Jobbles performed with a mildness of manner that was beyond all praise. A mother training her first-born to say "papa," could not do so with a softer voice, or more affectionate demeanour.

"The planet Jupiter?" said he to Mr. Precis; "I have no doubt you know accurately the computed distance of that planet from the sun, and also that of our own planet. Could you tell me

now, how would you calculate the distance in inches, say from London Bridge to the nearest portion of Jupiter's disc, at twelve o'clock on the 1st of April?" Mr. Jobbles, as he put his little question, smiled the sweetest of smiles ; and spoke in a tone conciliating and gentle, as though he were asking Mr. Precis to dine with him and take part of a bottle of claret at half-past six.

But, nevertheless, Mr. Precis looked very blank.

"I am not asking the distance, you know," said Mr. Jobbles, smiling sweeter than ever ; "I am only asking how you would compute it."

But still Mr. Precis looked exceedingly blank.

"Never mind," said Mr. Jobbles, with all the encouragement which his voice could give, "never mind. Now, suppose that *a* be a milestone ; *b*, a turnpike-gate," — and so on.

But Mr. Jobbles, in spite of his smiles, so awed the hearts of some of his candidates, that two of them retired at the end of the second day. Poor Robinson, thinking, and not without sufficient ground, that he had not a ghost of a chance, determined to save himself from further annoyance ; and then Norman, put utterly out of conceit with himself by what he deemed the insufficiency of his answers, did the same. He had become low in spirits, unhappy in temperament,

and self-diffident to a painful degree. Alaric, to give him his due, did everything in his power to persuade him to see the task out to the last. But the assurance and composure of Alaric's manner did more than anything else to provoke and increase Norman's discomfiture. He had been schooling himself to bear a beating with a good grace, and he began to find that he could only bear it as a disgrace. The Secretaries and Assistant-Secretaries who had depended on him as their sure candidate, as the only man who could save them from the upraising of Sir Gregory's pet, did all that they could to reassure him ; but all they could do was of no avail. On the morning of the third day, instead of taking his place in the Board-room, he sent in a note to Mr. Jobbles, declaring that he withdrew from the trial. Mr. Jobbles read the note, and smiled with satisfaction as he put it into his pocket. It was an acknowledgment of his own unrivalled powers as an Examiner.

Mr. Precis, still trusting to his pure well, went on to the end, and at the end declared that so ignorant was Mr. Jobbles of his duty that he had given them no opportunity of showing what they could do in English composition. Why had he not put before them the papers in some

memorable official case, and desired them to make an abstract; those, for instance, on the much-vexed question of penny *versus* pound, as touching the new standard for the decimal coinage? Mr. Jobbles an Examiner indeed! And so Mr. Precis bethought himself that he also, if unsuccessful, would go to the Lords of the Treasury.

And Mr. Uppinall and Alaric Tudor also went on. Those who knew anything of the matter, when they saw how the running horses were reduced in number, and what horses were left on the course;—when they observed also how each steed came to the post on each succeeding morning, had no doubt whatever of the result. So that when Alaric was declared on the Saturday morning to have gained the prize, there was very little astonishment either felt or expressed at the Weights and Measures.

Alaric's juniors wished him joy with some show of reality in their manner; but the congratulations of his seniors, including the Secretary and Assistant-Secretaries, the new Chief Clerk and the men in the class to which he was now promoted, were very cold indeed. But to this he was indifferent. It was the nature of Tudor's disposition that he never for a moment rested

satisfied with the round of the ladder on which he had contrived to place himself. He had no sooner gained a step than he looked upwards to see how the next step was to be achieved. His motto might well have been “*excelsior!*” if only he could have taught himself to look to heights that were really high. When he found that the august Secretary received him on his promotion without much *empressement*, he comforted himself by calculating how long it would be before he should fill that Secretary’s chair—if indeed it should ever be worth his while to fill it.

The Secretary at the Weights and Measures had, after all, but a dull time of it, and was precluded by the routine of his office from parliamentary ambition and the joys of government. Alaric was already beginning to think that this Weights and Measures should only be a stepping-stone to him; and that when Sir Gregory with his stern dogma of devotion to the service had been of sufficient use to him, he also might with advantage be thrown over. In the mean time an income of £600 a-year brought with it to the young bachelor some very comfortable influence. But the warmest and the pleasantest of all the congratulations which he received was from his dear friend Undy Scott.

"Ah, my boy," said Undy, pressing his hand, "you'll soon be one of us. By the bye, I want to put you up for the Downing; you should leave that Pythagorean: there's nothing to be got by it."

Now, the Downing was a political club; in which, however, politics had latterly become a good deal mixed. But the government of the day generally found there a liberal support, and recognised and acknowledged its claim to consideration.

CHAPTER XII.

CONSOLATION.

ON the following Sunday neither Tudor nor Norman were at Hampton. They had both felt that they could not comfortably meet each other there, and each had declined to go. They had promised to write; and now that the matter was decided, how were they, or either of them, to keep the promise?

It may be thought that the bitterness of the moment was over with Norman as soon as he gave up; but such was not the case. Let him struggle as he would with himself he could not rally, nor bring himself to feel happy on what had occurred. He would have been better satisfied if Alaric would have triumphed; but Alaric seemed to take it all as a matter of course, and never spoke of his own promotion unless he did so in answer to some remark of his companion; then he could speak easily enough; otherwise he was willing to let the matter go by as one settled and at rest. He had consulted Norman about the purchase of a horse, but he hitherto

had shown no other sign that he was a richer man than formerly.

It was a very bitter time for Norman. He could not divest his mind of the subject. What was he to do? Where was he to go? How was he to get away, even for a time, from Alaric Tudor? And then, was he right in wishing to get away from him? Had he not told himself, over and over again, that it behoved him as a man and a friend and a Christian to conquer the bitter feeling of envy which preyed on his spirits? Had he not himself counselled Alaric to stand this examination, and had he not promised that his doing so should make no difference in their friendship? had he not pledged himself to rejoice in the success of his friend? and now was he to break his word both to that friend and to himself?

Schooling himself, or trying to school himself in this way, he made no attempt at escaping from his unhappiness. They passed the Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday evenings together. It was now nearly the end of September, and London was empty; that is, empty as regards those friends and acquaintances with whom Norman might have found some resource. On the Saturday they left their office early; for all office routine had, during this week, been broken

through by the immense importance of the ceremony which was going on ; and then it became necessary to write to Mrs. Woodward.

“ Will you write to Hampton or shall I ? ” said Alaric, as they walked arm-in-arm under the windows of Whitehall.

“ Oh ! you of course,” said Norman ; “ you have much to tell them, I have nothing.”

“ Just as you please,” said the other. “ That is, of course I will if you like it. But I think it would come better from you. You are nearer to them than I am ; and it will have less a look of triumph on my part, and less also of disappointment on yours, if you write. If you tell them that you literally threw away your chance, you will only tell them the truth.”

Norman assented, but he said nothing further. What business had Alaric to utter such words as triumph and disappointment ! He could not keep his arm, on which Alaric was leaning, from spasmodically shrinking from the touch. He had been beaten by a man, nay worse, had yielded to a man, who had not the common honesty to refuse a bribe ; and yet he was bound to love this man. He could not help asking himself the question, which he would do ? Would he love him or hate him ?

But while he was so questioning himself he

got home, and had to sit down and write his letter—this he did at once, but not without difficulty. It ran as follows:—

“ My dear Mrs. Woodward,—

“ I write a line to tell you of my dis-comforture and Alaric’s success. I gave up at the end of the second day. Of course I will tell you all about it when we meet. No one seemed to doubt that Alaric would get it, as a matter of course. I shall be with you on next Saturday. Alaric says he will not go down till the Saturday after, when I shall be at Normans-grove. My best love to the girls. Tell Katie I shan’t drown either myself or the boat.

“ Yours ever affectionately, H. N.

“ Saturday, September 185 .

“ Pray write me a kind letter to comfort me.”

Mrs. Woodward did write him a very kind letter, and it did comfort him. And she wrote also, as she was bound to do, a letter of congratulation to Alaric. This letter, though it expressed in the usual terms the satisfaction which one friend has in another’s welfare, was not written in the same warm affectionate tone as that to Norman. Alaric perceived instantly that it was not cordial. He loved Mrs. Woodward dearly, and greatly desired her love and

sympathy. But what then? he could not have everything. He determined, therefore, not to trouble his mind. If Mrs. Woodward did not sympathise with him, others of the family would do so; and success would ultimately bring her round. What woman ever yet refused to sympathise with successful ambition?

Alaric also received a letter from Captain Cuttwater, in which that gallant veteran expressed his great joy at the result of the examination—“Let the best man win all the world over,” said he, “whatever his name is. And they’ll have to make the same rule at the Admiralty too. The days of the Howards are gone by; that is, unless they can prove themselves able seamen, which very few of them ever did yet. Let the best man win; that’s what I say; and let every man get his fair share of promotion.” Alaric did not despise the sympathy of Captain Cuttwater. It might turn out that even Captain Cuttwater could be made use of.

Mrs. Woodward’s letter to Harry was full of the tenderest affection. It was a flattering, soothing, loving letter, such as no man ever could have written. It was like oil poured into his wounds, and made him feel that the world was still worth living for. He had determined

not to go to Hampton that Saturday ; but Mrs. Woodward's letter almost made him rush there at once that he might throw himself into her arms—into her arms, and at her daughter's feet. The time had now come to him when he wanted to be comforted by the knowledge that his love was returned. He resolved that during his next visit he would formally propose to Gertrude.

The determination to do this, and a strong hope that he might do it successfully kept him up during the interval. On the following week he was to go to his father's place to shoot, having obtained leave of absence for a month ; and he felt that he could still enjoy himself if he could take with him the conviction that all was right at Surbiton Cottage. Mrs. Woodward in her letter, though she had spoken much of the girls, had said nothing special about Gertrude. Nevertheless, Norman gathered from it that she intended that he should go thither to look for comfort, and that he would find there the comfort that he required.

And Mrs. Woodward had intended that such should be the effect of her letter. It was at present the dearest wish of her heart to see Norman and Gertrude married. That Norman had often declared his love to her eldest daughter

she knew very well, and she knew also that Gertrude had never rejected him. Having perfect confidence in her child she had purposely abstained from saying anything that could bias her opinion. She had determined to leave the matter in the hands of the young people themselves, judging that it might be best arranged as a true love-match between them, without interference from her ; she had therefore said nothing to Gertrude on the subject.

Mrs. Woodward, however, discovered that she was in error, when it was too late for her to retrieve her mistake ; and indeed had she discovered it before that letter was written what could she have done ? She could not have forbidden Harry to come to her house—she could not have warned him not to throw himself at her daughter's feet. The cup was prepared for his lips, and it was necessary that he should drink of it. There was nothing for which she could blame him ; nothing for which she could blame herself ; nothing for which she did blame her daughter. It was sorrowful, pitiful, to be lamented, wept for, aye, and groaned for ; many inward groans it cost her ; but it was at any rate well that she could attribute her sorrow to the spite of circumstances rather than to the ill-conduct of those she loved.

Nor would it have been fair to blame Gertrude in the matter. While she was yet a child, this friend of her mother's had been thrown with her, and when she was little more than a child, she found that this friend had become a lover. She liked him, in one sense loved him, and was accustomed to regard him as one whom it would be almost wrong in her not to like and love. What wonder then that when he first spoke to her warm words of adoration, she had not been able at once to know her own heart, and tell him that his hopes would be in vain ! She perceived by instinct rather than by spoken words, that her mother was favourable to this young lover, that if she accepted him she would please her mother, that the course of true love might in their case run smooth, and that all outward circumstances were in favour of her becoming Harry Norman's wife.

What wonder then that she should have hesitated before she found it necessary to say that she could not, would not, be Harry Norman's wife ?

On the Saturday morning, the morning of that night which was, as he hoped, to see him go to bed a happy lover, so happy in his love as to be able to forget his other sorrows, she was sit-

ting alone with her mother. It was natural that their conversation should turn to Alaric and Harry. Alaric, however, with his happy prospects was soon dismissed; but Mrs. Woodward continued to sing the praises of him who, had she been potent with the magi of the Civil Service, would now be the lion of the Weights and Measures.

"I must say, I think it was weak of him to retire," said Gertrude. "Alaric says in his letter to Uncle Bat, that had he persevered he would in all probability have been successful."

"I should rather say that it was generous," said her mother.

"Well, I don't know, mama; that of course depends on his motives; but wouldn't generosity of that sort between two young men in such a position be absurd?"

"You mean that such regard for his friend would be Quixotic."

"Yes, mama."

"Perhaps it would. All true generosity, all noble feeling, is now called Quixotic. But surely, Gertrude, you and I should not quarrel with Harry on that account."

"I think he got frightened, mama, and had not nerve to go through with it."

Mrs. Woodward looked vexed ; but she made no immediate reply, and for some time the mother and daughter went on working without further conversation. At last Gertrude said—

“ I think every man is bound to do the best he can for himself,—that is, honestly ; there is something spoony in one man allowing another to get before him, as long as he can manage to be first himself.”

Mrs. Woodward did not like the tone in which her daughter spoke. She felt that it boded ill for Harry’s welfare ; and she tried, but tried in vain, to elicit from her daughter the expression of a kinder feeling.

“ Well, my dear, I must say I think you are hard on him. But probably just at present you have the spirit of contradiction in you. If I were to begin to abuse him, perhaps I should get you to praise him.”

“ Oh mama, I did not abuse him.”

“ Something like it, my dear, when you said he was spoony.”

“ Oh, mama, I would not abuse him for worlds —I know how good he is, I know how you love him, but, but —” and Gertrude, though very little given to sobbing moods, burst into tears.

“ Come here, Gertrude, come here, my child,”

said Mrs. Woodward, now moved more for her daughter than for her favourite: "what is it? what makes you cry? I did not really mean that you abused poor Harry."

Gertrude got up from her chair, knelt at her mother's feet, and hid her face in her mother's lap—"Oh, mama," she said with a half-smothered voice, "I know what you mean; I know what you wish; but—but—but—oh, mama, you must not—must not, must not think of it any more."

"Then may God help him!" said Mrs. Woodward, gently caressing her daughter, who was still sobbing with her face buried in her mother's lap. "May God Almighty lighten the blow to him! But, oh, Gertrude, I had hoped, I had so hoped ——"

"Oh, mama, don't, pray don't," and Gertrude sobbed as though she were going into hysterics.

"No, my child, I will not say another word. Dear as he is to me, you are and must be ten times dearer. There, Gertrude, it is over now; over at least between us. We know each other's hearts now. It is my fault that we did not do so sooner." They did understand each other at last, and the mother made no further attempt to engage her daughter's love for the man she would have chosen as her daughter's husband.

But still the worst was to come, as Mrs. Woodward well knew,—and as Gertrude knew also; to come, too, on this very day. Mrs. Woodward, with a woman's keen perception, felt assured that Harry Norman when he found himself at the Cottage, freed from the presence of his rival, surrounded by the affectionate faces of all her circle, would melt at once and look to his love for consolation. She understood the feelings of his heart as well as though she had read them in a book; and yet she could do nothing to save him from his fresh sorrows. The cup was prepared for him and it was necessary that he should drink it. She could not tell him, could not tell even him, that her daughter had rejected him, when as yet he had made no offer.

And so Harry Norman hurried down to his fate. When he reached the Cottage Mrs. Woodward and Linda and Katie were in the drawing-room.

"Harry, my dear Harry," said Mrs. Woodward rushing to him, throwing her arms round him and kissing him: "we know it all, we understand it all—my fine, dear, good Harry."

Harry was melted in a moment, and in the softness of his mood kissed Katie too, and Linda also. Katie he had often kissed, but never

Linda, cousins though they were. Linda merely laughed, but Norman blushed; for he remembered that had it so chanced that Gertrude had been there, he would not have dared to kiss her.

"Oh, Harry," said Katie, "we are so sorry—that is, not sorry about Alaric, but sorry about you. Why were there not two prizes?"

"It is all right as it is, Katie," said he: "we need none of us be sorry at all. Alaric is a clever fellow; everybody gave him credit for it before, and now he has proved that everybody is right."

"He is older than you, you know, and therefore he ought to be cleverer," said Katie, trying to make things pleasant.

And then they went out into the garden. But where was Gertrude all this time? She had been in the drawing-room a moment before his arrival. They walked out into the lawn, but nothing was said about her absence. Norman could not bring himself to ask for her, and Mrs. Woodward could not trust herself to talk of her.

"Where is the captain?" said Harry.

"He's at Hampton Court," said Linda; "he has found another navy captain there, and he

goes over every day to play backgammon." As they were speaking, however, the captain walked through the house on to the lawn.

" Well, Norman, how are you, how are you? sorry you couldn't all win. But you're a man of fortune, you know, so it doesn't signify."

" Not a great deal of fortune," said Harry, looking sheepish.

" Well, I only hope the best man got it. Now, at the Admiralty the worst man gets it, always."

" The worst man didn't get it here," said Harry.

" No, no," said Uncle Bat, " I'm sure he did not; nor he won't long at the Admiralty either, I can tell them that. But where's Gertrude?"

" She's in her bed-room, dressing for dinner," said Katie.

" Hoity toity," said Uncle Bat—" she's going to make herself very grand to-day. That's all for you, master Norman. Well, I suppose we may all go in and get ready; but mind, I have got no sweetheart, and so I shan't make myself grand at all;" and so they all went in to dress for dinner.

When Norman came down, Gertrude was in the drawing-room alone. But he knew that

they would be alone but for a minute, and that a minute would not serve his purpose. She said one soft gentle word of condolence to him, some little sentence that she been studying to pronounce. All her study was thrown away ; for Norman, in his confusion, did not understand a word that she spoke. Her tone, however, was kind and affectionate ; and she shook hands with him apparently with cordiality. He, however, ventured no kiss with her. He did not even venture to press her hand, when for a moment he held it within his own.

His embarrassment was soon over, for Captain Cuttwater and the remainder of the party came into the room.

Their dinner party was not a merry one. Norman was still buoyed up with hope, but his hope was not of that confident kind which makes a man joyous. Mrs. Woodward had no hope to buoy her up. Do what she would, she could not be, nor could she even appear to be, like her usual self. Gertrude sat nearly mute ; once or twice she strove to speak, as though all things were going on in their usual course ; but she found that she failed, and so gave up the attempt. Linda and Katie were anxious to show their sympathy with Norman ; but people, when they

endeavour to make their manners overkind, frustrate their own good intentions. The unfortunate one involuntarily rejects and throws off from him sympathy which seems to arise from pity. Norman was better able to rally himself when, after dinner, Captain Cuttwater proposed the health of the winning horse. The toast was not, however, drank with much *éclat*, though the hero of it was so great a favourite with more than one of the assembled company.

The autumn evening still admitted of their going out after dinner, and Norman was not sorry to urge the fact that the ladies had done so as an excuse to Captain Cuttwater for not sitting with him over his wine. He heard their voices in the garden, and went out to join them, prepared to ascertain his fate if fortune would give him an opportunity of doing so. He found the party to consist of Mrs. Woodward, Linda and Katie ; Gertrude was not there.

"I think the evenings get warmer, as the winter gets nearer," said Harry.

"Yes," said Mrs. Woodward, "but they are so dangerous. The night comes on all at once, and then the air is so damp and cold."

And so they went on talking about the weather.

"Your boat is up in London, I know, Harry," said Katie, with a voice of reproach, but at the same time with a look of entreaty.

"Yes, it's at Searle's," said Norman.

"But the punt is here," said Katie.

"Not this evening, Katie," said he.

"Katie, how can you be such a teaze?" said Mrs. Woodward; "you'll make Harry hate the island, and you too. I wonder you can be so selfish."

Poor Katie's eyes became suffused with tears.

"My dear Katie, it's very bad of me, isn't it?" said Norman, "and the fine weather so nearly over too; I ought to take you, oughtn't I? come, we will go."

"No, we won't," said Katie, taking his big hand in both her little ones, "indeed we won't. It was very wrong of me to bother you; and you with—with—with so much to think of. Dear Harry, I don't want to go at all, indeed, I don't;" and she turned away from the little path which led to the place where the punt was moored.

They sauntered on for awhile together, and then Norman left them. He said nothing, but merely stole away from the lawn towards the drawing-room window. Mrs. Woodward well

knew with what object he went, and would have spared him from his immediate sorrow by following him ; but she judged that it would be better both for him and for her daughter that he should learn the truth.

He went in through the open drawing-room window, and found Gertrude alone. She was on the sofa with a book in her hand ; and had he been able to watch her closely he would have seen that the book trembled as he entered the room. But he was unable to watch anything closely. His own heart beat so fast, his own confusion was so great, that he could hardly see the girl whom he now hoped to gain as his wife. Had Alaric been coming to his wooing, he would have had every faculty at his call. But then Alaric could not have loved as Norman loved.

And so we will leave them. In about half an hour, when the short twilight was becoming dusk, Mrs. Woodward returned and found Norman standing alone on the hearth-rug before the fire-place. Gertrude was away, and he was leaning against the mantel-piece, with his hands behind his back, staring at vacancy ; but oh ! with such an aspect of dull speechless agony in his face.

Mrs. Woodward looked up at him, and would

have burst into tears, had she not remembered that they would not be long alone; she therefore restrained herself, but gave one involuntary sigh; and then taking off her bonnet, placed herself where she might sit without staring at him in his sorrow.

Katie came in next. "Oh! Harry, it's so lucky we didn't start in the punt," said she, "for it's going to pour, and we never should have been back from the island in that slow thing."

Norman looked at her and tried to smile, but the attempt was a ghastly failure. Katie, gazing up into his face, saw that he was unhappy, and slunk away, without further speech, to her distant chair. There, from time to time, she would look up at him, and her little heart melted with ruth to see the depth of his misery. "Why, oh why," thought she, "should that greedy Alaric have taken away the only prize?"

And then Linda came running in with her bonnet ribbons all moist with the big rain drops. "You are a nice squire of dames," said she, "to leave us all out to get wet through by ourselves;" and then she also, looking up, saw that jesting was at present ill-timed, and so sat herself down quietly at the tea-table.

But Norman never moved. He saw them come in, one after another. He saw the pity expressed in Mrs. Woodward's face ; he heard the light-hearted voices of the two girls, and observed how, when they saw him, their light-heartedness was abashed ; but still he neither spoke nor moved. He had been stricken with a fearful stroke, and for a while was powerless.

Captain Cuttwater having shaken off his dining-room nap, came for his tea ; and then, at last, Gertrude also, descending from her own chamber, glided quietly into the room. When she did so, Norman, with a struggle, roused himself, and took a chair next to Mrs. Woodward, and opposite to her eldest daughter.

Who could describe the intense discomfiture of that tea party, or paint in fitting colours the different misery of each one there assembled ? Even Captain Cuttwater at once knew that something was wrong, and munched his bread-and-butter and drank his tea in silence. Linda surmised what had taken place ; though she was surprised, she was left without any doubt. Poor Katie was still in the dark, but she also knew that there was cause for sorrow, and crept more and more into her little self.

Mrs. Woodward sat with averted face, and ever and anon she put her handkerchief to her eyes. Gertrude was very pale, and all but motionless, but she had schooled herself, and managed to drink her tea with more apparent indifference than any of the others. Norman sat as he had before been standing, with that dreadful look of agony upon his brow.

Immediately after tea Mrs. Woodward got up and went to her dressing-room. Her dressing-room, though perhaps not improperly so called, was not an exclusive closet devoted to combs, petticoats, and soap and water. It was a comfortable snug room, nicely furnished, with sofa and easy chairs, and often opened to others besides her hand-maidens. Thither she betook herself, that she might weep unseen; but in about twenty minutes her tears were disturbed by a gentle knock at the door.

Very soon after she went, Gertrude also left the room, and then Katie crept off.

"I have got a head-ache to-night," said Norman, after the remaining three had sat silent for a minute or two; "I think I'll go across and go to bed."

"A head-ache!" said Linda. "Oh, I am so sorry that you have got to go to that horrid inn."

"Oh! I shall do very well there," said Norman, trying to smile.

"Will you have my room?" said the captain, good-naturedly: "any sofa does for me."

Norman assured them as well as he could that his present head-ache was of such a nature that a bed at the inn would be the best thing for him; and then, shaking hands with them, he moved to the door.

"Stop a moment, Harry," said Linda, "and let me tell mama. She'll give you something for your head." He made a sign to her, however, to let him pass, and then, creeping gently up stairs, he knocked at Mrs. Woodward's door.

"Come in," said Mrs. Woodward, and Harry Norman, with all his sorrow still written on his face, stood before her.

"Oh! Harry," said she, "come in; I am so glad that you have come to me. Oh! Harry, dear Harry, what shall I say to comfort you? What can I say—what can I do?"

Norman, forgetting his manhood, burst into tears, and, throwing himself on a sofa, buried his face on the arm and sobbed like a young girl. But the tears of a man bring with them no comfort as do those of the softer sex. He was

a strong tall man, and it was dreadful to see him thus convulsed.

Mrs. Woodward stood by him, and put her hand caressingly on his shoulder. She saw he had striven to speak, and had found himself unable to do so. "I know how it is," said she— "you need not tell me; I know it all. Would that she could have seen you with my eyes; would that she could have judged you with my mind."

"Oh, Mrs. Woodward!"

"To me, Harry, you should have been the dearest, the most welcome son. But you are so still. No son could be dearer. Oh, that she could have seen you as I see you."

"There is no hope," said he. He did not put it as a question; but Mrs. Woodward saw that it was intended that she should take it as such if she pleased. What could she say to him? She knew that there was no hope. Had it been Linda, Linda might have been moulded to her will. But with Gertrude there could now be no hope. What could she say? She knelt down and kissed his brow, and mingled her tears with his. "Oh, Harry—oh, Harry, my dearest, dearest son."

"Oh, Mrs. Woodward, I have loved her so truly."

What could Mrs. Woodward do but cry also? what but that, and throw such blame as she could upon her own shoulders? She was bound to defend her daughter.

"It has been my fault, Harry," she said; "it is I whom you must blame, not poor Gertrude."

"I blame no one," said he.

"I know you do not; but it is I whom you should blame. I should have learnt how her heart stood and have prevented this—but I thought, I thought it would have been otherwise."

Norman looked up at her, and took her hand, and pressed it. "I will go now," he said, "and don't expect me here to-morrow. I could not come in. Say that I thought it best to go to town because I am unwell. Good bye, Mrs. Woodward; pray write to me. I can't come to the Cottage now for awhile, but pray write to me: do not you forget me, Mrs. Woodward."

Mrs. Woodward fell upon his breast and wept, and bade God bless him, and called him her son and her dearest friend, and sobbed till her heart was nigh to break. "What," she thought, "what could her daughter wish for, when she repulsed from her feet such a suitor as Harry Norman!"

He then went quietly down the stairs, quietly out of the house, and having packed up his bag

at the inn, started off through the pouring rain, and walked away through the dark stormy night, through the dirt and mud and wet, to his London lodgings ; nor was he again seen at Surbiton Cottage for some months after this adventure.

CHAPTER XIII.

A COMMUNICATION OF IMPORTANCE.

NORMAN's dark wet walk did him physically no harm, and morally some good. He started on it in that frame of mind which induces a man to look with indifference on all coming evils under the impression that the evils already come are too heavy to admit of any increase. But by the time that he was thoroughly wet through, well splashed with mud, and considerably fatigued by his first five or six miles' walk, he began to reflect that life was not over with him, and that he must think of future things as well as those that were past.

Were it not that he had started from Hampton in such impatient haste, leaving behind him his bag and luggage, he would have stopped at some friendly hostel half-way on his road and whiled away the following Sunday in solitary meditation on his present prospects. But being, as he was, wet through and without clothes, this could not be thought of, and he had nothing for it but to go on and encounter Alaric at the lodgings in London.

And as he went he reflected that it would be better for him to do so. It would be better that Alaric should learn the truth from him than at the Cottage. That he must learn the truth sooner or later, Norman felt to be unavoidable.

He got home about two o'clock, and having knocked up his landlady, Mrs. Richards, betook himself to bed. Alaric had been in his room for the last two hours, but of Charley and his latch-key Mrs. Richards knew nothing. She stated her belief, however, that two a.m. seldom saw that erratic gentleman in his bed.

On the following morning Alaric, when he got his hot water, heard that Norman had returned during the night from Hampton, and he immediately guessed what had brought him back. He knew that nothing short of some great trouble would have induced Harry to leave the Cottage so abruptly, and that that trouble must have been of such a nature as to make his remaining with the Woodwards an aggravation of it. No such trouble could have come on him but the one.

As Charley seldom made his appearance at the breakfast table on Sunday mornings, Alaric fore-saw that he must undergo a *tête-à-tête* which would not be agreeable to himself, and which

must be much more disagreeable to his companion; but for this there was no help. Harry had, however, prepared himself for what he had to go through, and immediately that the two were alone, he told his tale in a very few words.

"Alaric," said he, "I proposed to Gertrude, last night, and she refused me."

Alaric Tudor was deeply grieved for his friend. There was something in the rejected suitor's countenance, something in his tone of voice, which would have touched any heart softer than stone; and Alaric's heart had not as yet been so hardened by the world as to render him callous to the sight of such grief as this. For a moment he forgot himself, his own schemes and plans, aye, and his own love, and sympathised with the sorrowing rejected lover.

"Take my word for it, Harry, she'll think better of it in a month or two," he said.

"Never—never; I am sure of it. Not only from her own manner, but from her mother's," said Harry. And yet, during half his walk home, he had been trying to console himself with the reflection that most young ladies reject their husbands once or twice before they accept them.

There is no offering a man comfort in such a sorrow as this ; unless, indeed, he be one to whom the worship of Bacchus may be made a fitting substitute for that of the Paphian goddess.

There is a sort of disgrace often felt, if never acknowledged, which attaches itself to a man for having put himself into Norman's present position, and this generally prevents him from confessing his defeat in such matters. The misfortune in question is one which doubtless occurs, not unfrequently, to mankind; but as mankind generally bear their special disappointments in silence, and as the vanity of women is generally exceeded by their good-nature, the secret, we believe, in most cases remains a secret.

“ Shall I, wasting in despair,
Die because a woman's fair?
If she be not fair for me,
What care I, how fair she be?

This was the upshot of the consideration which Withers, the poet, gave to the matter, and Withers was doubtless right. 'Tis thus that rejected lovers should think, thus that they should demean themselves ; but they seldom come to this philosophy till a few days have

passed by, and talking of their grievance does not assist them in doing so.

When, therefore, Harry had declared what had happened to him, and had declared also that he had no further hope, he did not at first find himself much the better for what he had confessed. He was lackadaisical and piteous, and Alaric, though he had endeavoured to be friendly, soon found that he had no power of imparting any comfort. Early in the day they parted, and did not see each other again till the following morning.

"I was going down to Norman's Grove on Thursday," said Harry.

"Yes, I know," said Alaric.

"I think I shall ask leave to go to-day. It can't make much difference, and the sooner I get away the better."

And so it was settled. Norman left town the same afternoon, and Alaric, with his blushing honours thick upon him, was left alone.

London was now very empty, and he was constrained to enjoy his glory very much by himself. He had never associated much with the Minusexes and Uppinalls, nor yet with the Jones's and Robinsons of his own office, and it could not be expected that there should be

any specially confidential intercourse between them just at the present moment. Undy was of course out of town with the rest of the fashionable world, and Alaric, during the next week, was left very much on his own hands.

"And so," said he to himself, as he walked solitary along the lone paths of Rotten Row, and across the huge desert to the Marble Arch, "and so poor Harry's hopes have been all in vain; he has lost his promotion, and now he has lost his bride—poor Harry!"—and then it occurred to him that as he had acquired the promotion it might be his destiny to win the bride also. He had never told himself that he loved Gertrude; he had looked on her as Norman's own, and he, at any rate, was not the man to sigh in despair after anything that was out of his reach. But now, now that Harry's chance was over, and that no bond of friendship could interfere with such a passion, why should he not tell himself that he loved Gertrude? "If," as Harry had himself said, "there was no longer any hope for him, why," said Alaric to himself, "why should not I try my chance?" Of Linda, of 'dear, dearest Linda,' at this moment he thought very little, or, perhaps, not

at all. Of what Mrs. Woodward might say, of that he did think a good deal.

The week was melancholy and dull, and it passed very slowly at Hampton. On the Sunday morning it became known to them all that Norman was gone, but the subject, by tacit consent, was allowed to pass all but unnoticed. Even Katie, even Uncle Bat, were aware that something had occurred which ought to prevent them from inquiring too particularly why Harry had started back to town in so sudden a manner; and so they said nothing. To Linda Gertrude had told what had happened; and Linda, as she heard it, asked herself whether she was prepared to be equally obdurate with her lover. He had now the means of supporting a wife, and why should she be obdurate?

Nothing was said on the subject between Gertrude and her mother. What more could Mrs. Woodward say? It would have been totally opposed to the whole principle of her life to endeavour, by any means, to persuade her daughter to the match, or to have used her maternal influence in Norman's favour. And she was well aware that it would have been impossible to do so successfully. Gertrude was not a girl to be talked into a marriage by any parent, and certainly not by such a

parent as her mother. There was, therefore nothing further to be said about it.

But they both felt that their different wishes, and different aspirations, had made a temporary estrangement between them, which neither of them could avert or avoid. They both were thinking of Harry Norman, but neither of them could talk about him.

On Saturday Alaric went down, but his arrival hardly made things more pleasant. Mrs. Woodward could not bring herself to be cordial with him, and the girls were restrained by a certain feeling that it would not be right to show too much outward joy in Alaric's success. Linda said one little word of affectionate encouragement, but it produced no apparent return from Alaric. His immediate object was to recover Mrs. Woodward's good graces; and he thought before he went that he had reason to hope that he might do so.

Of all the household, Captain Cuttwater was the most emphatic in his congratulations. "He had no doubt," he said, "that the best man had won. He had always hoped that the best man might win. He had not had the same luck when he was young, but he was very glad to see such an excellent rule brought into the service. It

would soon work great changes, he was quite sure, at the Board of Admiralty."

On the Sunday afternoon Captain Cuttwater asked him into his own bed-room, and told him with a solemn serious manner that he had a communication of importance to make to him. Alaric followed the captain into the well-known room in which Norman used to sleep, wondering what could be the nature of Uncle Bat's important communication. It might, probably, be some tidings of Sir Jib Boom.

"Mr. Alaric," said the old man, as soon as they were both seated on opposite sides of a little Pembroke table that stood in the middle of the room, "I was heartily glad to hear of your success at the Weights and Measures; not that I ever doubted it if they made a fair sailing match of it."

"I am sure I am much obliged to you, Captain Cuttwater."

"That is may be, by-and-by. But the fact is, I have taken a fancy to you. I like fellows that know how to push themselves."

Alaric had nothing for it but to repeat again that he felt himself grateful for Captain Cuttwater's good opinion.

"Not that I have anything to say against

Mr. Norman ;—a very nice young man, indeed, he is, very nice—though perhaps not quite so cheerful in his manners as he might be.”

Alaric began to take his friend’s part, and declared what a very worthy fellow Harry was.

“ I am sure of it—I am sure of it,” said Uncle Bat : “ but everybody can’t be A 1 ; and a man can’t make everybody his heir.”

Alaric pricked up his ears. So after all Captain Cuttwater was right in calling his communication important. But what business had Captain Cuttwater to talk of making new heirs ?—had he not declared that the Woodwards were his heirs ?

“ I have got a little money, Mr. Alaric,” he went on saying in a low modest tone, very different from that he ordinarily used ; “ I have got a little money—not much—and it will of course go to my niece here.”

“ Of course,” said Alaric.

“ That is to say—it will go to her children, which is all the same thing.”

“ Quite the same thing,” said Alaric.

“ But my idea is this : if a man has saved a few pounds himself, I think he has a right to give it to those he loves best. Now I have no children of my own.”

Alaric declared himself aware of the fact.

"And I suppose I shan't have any now."

"Not if you don't marry," said Alaric, who felt rather at a loss for a proper answer. He could not, however, have made a better one.

"No, that's what I mean: but I don't think I shall marry. I am very well contented here, and I like Surbiton Cottage amazingly."

"It's a charming place," said Alaric.

"No, I don't suppose I shall ever have any children of my own," and then Uncle Bat sighed gently—"and so I have been considering whom I should like to adopt."

"Quite right, Captain Cuttwater."

"Whom I should like to adopt. I should like to have one whom I could call in a special manner my own. Now, Mr. Alaric, I have made up my mind, and who do you think it is?"

"Oh! Captain Cuttwater, I couldn't guess on such a matter. I shouldn't like to guess wrong."

"Perhaps not—no; that's right;—well then, I'll tell you; it's Gertrude."

Alaric was well aware that it was Gertrude before her name had been pronounced.

"Yes, it's Gertrude; of course I couldn't go

out of Bessie's family—of course it must be either Gertrude, or Linda, or Katie. Now Linda and Katie are very well, but they haven't half the gumption that Gertrude has."

"No, they have not," said Alaric.

"I like gumption," said Captain Cuttwater. "You've a great deal of gumption—that's why I like you."

Alaric laughed, and muttered something.

"Now I have been thinking of something;" and Uncle Bat looked strangely mysterious—"I wonder what you think of Gertrude?"

"Who—I?" said Alaric.

"I can see through a millstone as well as another," said the captain; "and I used to think that Norman and Gertrude meant to hit it off together."

Alaric said nothing. He did not feel inclined to tell Norman's secret, and yet he could not belie Gertrude by contradicting the justice of Captain Cuttwater's opinion.

"I used to think so—but now I find there's nothing in it. I am sure Gertrude wouldn't have him, and I think she's right. He hasn't gumption enough."

"Harry Norman is no fool."

"I dare say not," said the captain; "but,

take my word, she'll never have him—Lord bless you, Norman knows that as well as I do.”*

Alaric knew it very well himself also; but he did not say so.

“Now, the long and the short of it is this—why don’t you make up to her? If you’ll make up to her and carry the day, all I can say is, I will do all I can to keep the pot a boiling; and if you think it will help you, you may tell Gertrude that I say so.”

This was certainly an important communication, and one to which Alaric found it very difficult to give any immediate answer. He said a great deal about his affection for Mrs. Woodward, of his admiration for Miss Woodward, of his strong sense of Captain Cuttwater’s kindness, and of his own unworthiness; but he left the captain with an impression that he was not prepared at the present moment to put himself forward as a candidate for Gertrude’s hand.

“I don’t know what the deuce he would have,” said the captain to himself. “She’s as fine a girl as he’s likely to find; and two or three thousand pounds isn’t so easily got every day by a fellow that hasn’t a shilling of his own.”

The truth was, that Alaric had been so much taken by surprise, that he had hardly known how to reply. Had he at once jumped at his offer, he would have appeared to be mercenary and to have been too willing to make up his mind to take a wife merely because she was offered to him with money. Had he declared that he had for some time loved Gertrude Woodward, he would have been making a confidant of Uncle Bat, which he was by no means willing to do. What if Gertrude should still refuse him? His intention was to declare his object openly to no one, not even to Gertrude herself, until he had fair reasons for judging that she would not refuse him. So he said very little to Uncle Bat. But he did not on that account the less make up his mind to avail himself of his generosity. Alaric returned to town without saying anything of his love on the occasion either to Gertrude or to Captain Cuttwater. When he took his departure he thought he perceived, from Mrs. Woodward's manner, that there was less than her usual cordiality in the tone in which she said that of course he would return at the end of the week.

"I will if possible," he said, "and I need not say that I hope to do so; but I fear I may be

kept in town—at any rate I'll write." When the end of the week came he wrote to say that unfortunately he was kept in town. He thoroughly understood that people are most valued when they make themselves scarce. He got in reply a note from Gertrude, saying that her mother begged that on the following Saturday he would come and bring Charley with him.

On his return to town Alaric, by appointment, called on Sir Gregory. He had not seen his patron yet since his great report on Wheal Mary Jane had been sent in. That report had been written exclusively by himself, and poor Neverbend had been obliged to content himself with putting all his voluminous notes into Tudor's hands. He afterwards obediently signed the report, and received his reward for doing so. Alaric never divulged to official ears how Neverbend had halted in the course of his descent to the infernal gods.

"I thoroughly congratulate you," said Sir Gregory. "You have justified my choice, and done your duty with credit to yourself and benefit to the public—I hope you may go on and prosper;—as long as you remember that your own interests should always be kept in subservience to those of the public service, you will not

fail to receive the praise which such conduct deserves."

Alaric thanked Sir Gregory for his good opinion, and as he did so, he thought of his new banker's account ; and of the £300 which was lying there. After all, which of them was right, Sir Gregory Hardlines or Undy Scott ? Or was it that Sir Gregory's opinions were such as should control the outward conduct, and Undy's those which should rule the inner man ?

CHAPTER XIV.

VERY SAD.

NORMAN prolonged his visit to his father considerably beyond the month. At first he applied for and received permission to stay away another fortnight, and at the end of that fortnight he sent up a medical certificate in which the doctor alleged that he would be unable to attend to business for some considerable additional period. It was not till after Christmas Day that he reappeared at the Weights and Measures.

And the medical certificate had been no fiction. For some weeks Norman had been much too ill to do any work, too ill even to travel up to London. When he did return, his altered appearance plainly showed that he had not been adopting any of those malingering tricks, which, according to common report, were so usual at the Internal Navigation. It soon got bruited about that his illness had been brought on by disappointment ; and the men of the Weights and Measures were not slow to attribute it to his failure at the examination. But that cannot

of misery had been drowned in other misery ; and had not been, at any rate, the primary cause of his illness.

Alaric kept his appointment at Hampton, and took Charley with him. And on the two following Saturdays he also went there, and on both occasions Charley accompanied him. During these visits, he devoted himself, as closely as he could, to Mrs. Woodward. He talked to her of Norman, and of Norman's prospects in the office ; he told her how he had intended to abstain from offering himself as a competitor, till he had, as it were, been forced by Norman to do so ; he declared over and over again that Norman would have been victorious had he stood his ground to the end, and assured her that such was the general opinion through the whole establishment. And this he did without talking much about himself, or praising himself in any way when he did so. His speech was wholly of his friend, and of the sorrow that he felt that his friend should have been disappointed in his hopes.

All this had its effects. Much of it Mrs. Woodward had heard before from Norman himself. He had told her that he had insisted on Alaric putting himself among the candidates,

and that Alaric had strongly dissuaded him when he resolved to give up his chance. By degrees Mrs. Woodward allowed herself to be brought round, and to reflect that, though she grieved for Harry, there was no just reason why she should refuse her sympathy and affection to Alaric.

Of Norman's rejected love, they neither of them spoke. Each knew that the other must be aware of it, but the subject was far too tender to be touched, at any rate as yet. And so matters went on, and Alaric regained the footing of favour, which he had for a while lost, with the mistress of the house.

But there was one inmate of Surbiton Cottage who saw that though Alaric spent so much of his time with Mrs. Woodward, he found opportunity also for other private conversation; and this was Linda. Why was it that in the moments before they dressed for dinner Alaric was whispering with Gertrude and not with her? Why was it that Alaric had felt it necessary to stay from church that Sunday evening when Gertrude also had been prevented from going by a head-ache? He had remained, he said, in order that Captain Cuttwater might have company; but Linda was not slow to learn that Uncle Bat had been

left to doze away the time by himself. Why, on the following Monday, had Gertrude been down so early, and why had Alaric been over from the inn full half-an-hour before his usual time? Linda saw and knew all this, and was disgusted. But even then she did not, could not think that Alaric could be untrue to her; that her own sister would rob her of her lover. It could not be that there should be such baseness in human nature!

Poor Linda!

And yet, though she did not believe that such falseness could exist in this world of hers at Surbiton Cottage, she could not restrain herself from complaining rather petulantly to her sister, as they were going to bed on that Sunday evening.

"I hope your head-ache is better," she said, in a tone of voice as near to irony as her soft nature could produce.

"Yes, it is quite well now," said Gertrude, disdaining to notice the irony.

"I dare say Alaric had a head-ache too. I suppose one was about as bad as the other."

"Linda," said Gertrude, answering rather with dignity than with anger, "you ought to know by this time that it is not likely that I

should plead false excuses. Alaric never said he had a head-ache."

"He said he stayed from church to be with Uncle Bat; but when we came back we found him with you."

"Uncle Bat went to sleep, and then he came into the drawing-room."

The two girls said nothing more about it. Linda should have remembered that she had never breathed a word to her sister of Alaric's passion for herself. Gertrude's solemn propriety had deterred her, just as she was about to do so. How very little of that passion had Alaric breathed himself; and yet, alas! enough to fill the fond girl's heart with dreams of love which occupied all her waking, all her sleeping thoughts. Oh! ye ruthless swains, from whose unhallowed lips fall words full of poisoned honey, do ye never think of the bitter agony of many months, of the dull misery of many years, of the cold monotony of an uncheered life, which follow so often as the consequence of your short hour of pastime?

On the Monday morning, as soon as Alaric and Charley had started for town—it was the morning on which Linda had been provoked to find that both Gertrude and Alaric had

been up half-an-hour before they should have been—Gertrude followed her mother to her dressing-room, and, with palpitating heart, closed the door behind her.

Linda remained down stairs, putting away her tea and sugar, not in the best of humours; but Katie, according to her wont, ran up after her mother.

“Katie,” said Gertrude, as Katie bounced into the room, “dearest Katie, I want to speak a word to mama—alone. Will you mind going down, just for a few minutes;” and she put her arm round her sister, and kissed her with almost unwonted tenderness.

“Go, Katie, dear,” said Mrs. Woodward; and Katie, speechless, retired.

“Gertrude has got something particular to tell mama; something that I may not hear. I wonder what it is about?” said Katie to her second sister.

Linda’s heart sank within her. “Could it be? No, it could not, could not be that the sweet voice which had whispered in her ears those well-remembered words, could have again whispered the same into other ears! That the very Gertrude who had warned her not to listen to such words from such lips, should

have listened to them herself, and have adopted them and made them her own. It could not, could not be!" and yet Linda's heart sank low within her.

* * * * *

"If you really love him"—said the mother, again caressing her eldest daughter as she acknowledged her love, but hardly with such tenderness as when that daughter had repudiated that other love—"if you really love him, dearest, of course I do not, of course I cannot object."

"I do, mama; I do."

"Well then, Gertrude, so be it. I have not a word to say against your choice. Had I not believed him to be an excellent young man, I should not have allowed him to be here with you so much as he has been. We cannot all see with the same eyes, dearest, can we?"

"No, mama;—but pray don't think I dislike poor Harry; and, Oh! mama, pray don't set him against Alaric because of this ——"

"Set him against Alaric! No, Gertrude, I certainly shall not do that. But whether I can reconcile Harry to it, that is another thing."

"At any rate he has no right to be angry at it," said Gertrude, assuming her air of dignity.

"Certainly not with you, Gertrude."

"No, nor with Alaric," said she, almost with indignation.

"That depends on what has passed between them. It is very hard to say how men so situated regard each other."

"I know everything that has passed between them," said Gertrude. "I never gave Harry any encouragement. As soon as I understood my own feelings I endeavoured to make him understand them also."

"But, my dearest, no one is blaming you."

"But you are blaming Alaric."

"Indeed I am not, Gertrude."

"No man could have behaved more honourably to his friend," said Gertrude; "no man more nobly; and if Harry does not feel it so, he has not the good heart for which I always gave him credit."

"Poor fellow! his friendship for Alaric will be greatly tried."

"And, mama, has not Alaric's friendship been tried? and has it not borne the trial nobly? Harry told him of—of—of his intentions; Harry told him long, long, long ago——"

"Ah! me—poor Harry!" sighed Mrs. Woodward.

" But you think nothing of Alaric?"

" Alaric is successful, my dear, and can——" think sufficiently of himself, Mrs. Woodward was going to say, but she stopped herself.

" Harry told him all," continued Gertrude, " and Alaric—Alaric said nothing of his own feelings. Alaric never said a word to me that he might not have said before his friend—till—till—; you must own, mama, that no one can have behaved more nobly than Alaric has done."

Mrs. Woodward, nevertheless, had her own sentiments on the matter, which were not quite in unison with those of her daughter. But then she was not in love with Alaric, and her daughter was. She thought that Alaric's love was a passion that had but lately come to the birth, and that had he been true to his friend—nobly true as Gertrude had described him—it would never have been born at all, or at any rate not till Harry had had a more prolonged chance of being successful with his suit. Mrs. Woodward understood human nature better than her daughter, or, at least, flattered herself that she did so, and she felt well assured that Alaric had not been dying for love during the period of Harry's unsuccessful courtship. He might, she

thought, have waited a little longer before he chose for his wife the girl whom his friend had loved, seeing that he had been made the confidant of that love.

Such were the feelings which Mrs. Woodward felt herself unable to repress: but she could not refuse her consent to the marriage. After all, she had some slight twinge of conscience, some inward conviction that she was prejudiced in Harry's favour, as her daughter was in Alaric's. Then she had lost all right to object to Alaric, by allowing him to be so constantly at the Cottage; and then again, there was nothing to which in reason she could object. In point of immediate income, Alaric was now the better match of the two. She kissed her daughter, therefore, and promised that she would do her best to take Alaric to her heart as her son-in-law.

"You will tell Uncle Bat, mama?" said Gertrude.

"Oh! yes—certainly, my dear; of course he'll be told. But I suppose it does not make much matter, immediately?"

"I think he should be told, mama; I should not like him to think that he was treated with anything like disrespect."

"Very well, my dear, I'll tell him," said Mrs.

Woodward, who was somewhat surprised at her daughter's punctilious feelings about Uncle Bat. However, it was all very proper ; and she was glad to think that her children were inclined to treat their grand uncle with respect, in spite of his long nose.

And then Gertrude was preparing to leave the room, but her mother stopped her. "Gertrude, dear," said she.

"Yes, mama."

"Come here, dearest ; shut the door. Gertrude, have you told Linda yet ?"

"No, mama, not yet."

As Mrs. Woodward asked the question, there was an indescribable look of painful emotion on her brow. It did not escape Gertrude's eye, and was not to her perfectly unintelligible. She had conceived an idea—why, she did not know—that these recent tidings of hers would not be altogether agreeable to her sister.

"No, mama, I have not told her ; of course I told you first. But now I shall do so immediately. Dearest Linda ! Alaric loves her already as dearly as if she were his own sister."

"Let me tell her," said Mrs. Woodward ; "will you, Gertrude ?"

"Oh ! certainly, mama, if you wish it."

Things were going wrong with Mrs. Woodward. She had perceived, with a mother's anxious eye, that her second daughter was not indifferent to Alaric Tudor. While she yet thought that Norman and Gertrude would have suited each other, this had caused her no disquietude. She herself had entertained none of those grand ideas to which Gertrude had given utterance with so much sententiousness, when she silenced Linda's tale of love before the telling of it had been commenced. Mrs. Woodward had always felt sufficiently confident that Alaric would push himself in the world, and she would have made no objection to him as a son-in-law had he been contented to take the second instead of the first of her flock.

She had never spoken to Linda on the matter, and Linda had offered to her no confidence; but she felt all but sure that her second child would not have entertained the affection which she had been unable altogether to conceal, had no lover's plea been poured into her ears. Mrs. Woodward questioned her daughters but little, but she understood well the nature of each, and could nearly read their thoughts. Linda's thoughts it was not difficult to read.

"Linda, pet," she said, as soon as she could

get Linda into her room without absolutely sending for her, "you have not yet heard Gertrude's news?"

"No," said Linda, turning very pale, and feeling that her heart was like to burst.

"I would let no one tell you, but myself, Linda. Come here, dearest; don't stand there away from me. Can you guess what it is?"

Linda, for a moment, could not speak. "No, mama;" she said at last, "I don't know what it is."

Mrs. Woodward twined her arm round her daughter's waist, as they sat on the sofa close to each other. Linda tried to compose herself, but she felt that she was trembling in her mother's arms. She would have given anything to be calm; anything to hide her secret. She little guessed then how well her mother knew it. Her eyes were turned down, and she found that she could not raise them to her mother's face.

"No, mama," she said. "I don't know—what is it?"

"Gertrude is to be married, Linda. She is engaged."

"I thought she refused Harry," said Linda, through whose mind a faint idea was passing of

the cruelty of nature's arrangements which gave all the lovers to her sister.

"Yes, dearest, she did; and now another has made an offer—she has accepted him." Mrs. Woodward could hardly bring herself to speak out that which she had to say, and yet she felt that she was only prolonging the torture for which she was so anxious to find a remedy.

"Has she?" said Linda, on whom the full certainty of her misery had now all but come.

"She has accepted our dear Alaric."

Our dear Alaric! what words for Linda's ears! They did reach her ears, but they did not dwell there—her soft gentle nature sank beneath the sound. Her mother, when she looked to her for a reply, found that she was sinking through her arms. Linda had fainted.

Mrs. Woodward neither screamed nor rang for assistance, nor emptied the water jug over her daughter, nor did anything else which would have the effect of revealing to the whole household the fact that Linda had fainted. She had seen girls faint before, and was not frightened. But how, when Linda recovered, was she to be comforted?

Mrs. Woodward laid her gently on the sofa, undid her dress, loosened her stays, and then sat

by her chafing her hands and moistening her lips and temples, till gradually the poor girl's eyes reopened. The recovery from a fainting fit, a real fainting fit I beg young ladies to understand, brings with it a most unpleasant sensation ; and for some minutes Linda's sorrow was quelled by her sufferings ; but as she recovered her strength she remembered where she was and what had happened, and sobbing violently she burst into an hysterical storm of tears.

Her most poignant feeling now was one of fear lest her mother should have guessed her secret ; and this Mrs. Woodward well understood. She could do nothing towards comforting her child till there was perfect confidence between them. It was easy to arrive at this with Linda, nor would it afterwards be difficult to persuade her as to the course she ought to take. The two girls were so essentially different ; the one so eager to stand alone and guide herself ; the other so prone to lean on the nearest support that came to her hand.

It was not long before Linda had told her mother everything. Either by words, or tears, or little signs of mute confession, she made her mother understand, with all but exactness, what had passed between Alaric and herself, and quite

exactly what had been the state of her own heart. She sobbed, and wept, and looked up to her mother for forgiveness as though she had been guilty of a great sin ; and when her mother caressed her with all a mother's tenderness, and told her that she was absolved from all fault, free of all blame, she was to a certain degree comforted. Whatever might now happen, her mother would be on her side. But Mrs. Woodward, when she looked into the matter, found that it was she that should have demanded pardon of her daughter, not her daughter of her ! Why had this tender lamb been allowed to wander out of the fold, while a wolf in sheep's clothing was invited into the pasture-ground ?

Gertrude, with her talent, her beauty, and dignity of demeanour, had hitherto been, perhaps, the closest to the mother's heart—had been, if not the most cherished, yet the most valued ; Gertrude had been the apple of her eye. This should be altered now. If a mother's love could atone for a mother's negligence, Mrs. Woodward would atone to her child for this hour of misery ! And Katie—her sweet, bonny Katie —she, at least, should be protected from the wolves. Those were the thoughts that passed

through Mrs. Woodward's heart as she sat there caressing Linda.

But how were things to be managed now at the present moment? It was quite clear that the wolf in sheep's clothing must be admitted into the pastoral family; either that, or the fairest lamb of the flock must be turned out altogether, to take upon herself lupine nature, and roam the woods, a beast of prey. As matters stood it behoved them to make such a sheep of Alaric as might be found practicable.

And so Mrs. Woodward set to work to teach her daughter how best she might conduct herself in her present state of wretchedness. She had to bear with her sister's success, to listen to her sister's joy, to enter into all her future plans, to assist at her toilet, to prepare her wedding garments, to hear the congratulations of friends, and take a sister's share in a sister's triumph, and to do this without once giving vent to a reproach. And she had worse than this to do; she had to encounter Alaric, and to wish him joy of his bride; she had to protect her female pride from the disgrace which a hopeless but acknowledged love would throw on it; she had to live in the house with Alaric as though he were her brother, and as though she had never

thought to live with him in any nearer tie. She would have to stand at the altar as her sister's bridesmaid, and see them married, and she would have to smile and be cheerful as she did so.

This was the lesson which Mrs. Woodward had now to teach her daughter; and she so taught it that Linda did do all that circumstances and her mother required of her. Late on that afternoon she went to Gertrude, and, kissing her, wished her joy. At that moment Gertrude was the more embarrassed of the two.

"Linda, dear Linda," she said, embracing her sister convulsively.

"I hope you will be happy, Gertrude, with all my heart," said Linda; and so she relinquished her lover.

We talk about the weakness of women, and Linda Woodward was, in many a way, weak enough. But what man, what giant, has strength equal to this? It was not that her love was feeble. Her heart was capable of truest love, and she had loved Alaric truly. But she had that within her which enabled her to overcome herself, and put her own heart, and hopes, and happiness—all but her maiden pride—into the background, when the hopes and happiness of another required it.

She still shared the same room with her sister ; and those who know how completely absorbed a girl is by her first acknowledged love, may imagine how many questions she had to answer, to how many propositions she was called on to assent, for how many schemes she had to vouchsafe a sister's interest, while her heart was telling her that she should have been the questioner, she should have been the proposer, that the schemes should all have been her own.

But she bore it bravely. When Alaric first came down, which he did in the middle of the week, she was, as she told her mother, too weak to stand in his presence. Her mother strongly advised her not to absent herself ; so she sat gently by, while he kissed Mrs. Woodward and Katie. She sat and trembled, for her turn, she knew, must come. It did come ; Alaric with an assurance which told more for his courage than for his heart, came up to her, and with a smiling face offered her his hand. She rose up and muttered some words which she had prepared for the occasion, and he, still holding her by the hand, stooped down and kissed her cheek. Mrs. Woodward looked on with an angry flush on her brow, and hated him for his cold-hearted propriety of demeanour.

Linda went up to her mother's room, and sitting on her mother's bed, sobbed herself into tranquillity.

It was very grievous to Mrs. Woodward to have to welcome Alaric to her house. For Alaric's own sake she would no longer have troubled herself to do so; but Gertrude was still her daughter, her dear child. Gertrude had done nothing to disentitle her to a child's part, and a child's protection; and even had she done so, Mrs. Woodward was not a woman to be unforgiving to her child. For Gertrude's sake she had to make Alaric welcome; she forced herself to smile on him and call him her son; to make him more at home in her house even than Harry had ever been; to give him privileges which he, wolf as he was, had so little deserved.

But Captain Cuttwater made up by the warmth of his congratulations for any involuntary coolness which Alaric might have detected in those of Mrs. Woodward. It had become a strong wish of the old man's heart that he might make Alaric, at any rate in part, his heir, without doing an injustice to his niece or her family. He had soon seen and appreciated what he had called the 'gumption' both of Gertrude and Alaric. Had Harry married Gertrude, and

Alaric Linda, he would have regarded either of those matches with disfavour. But now he was quite satisfied—now he could look on Alaric as his son and Gertrude as his daughter, and use his money according to his fancy, without incurring the reproaches of his conscience.

“Quite right, my boy,” he said to Alaric, slapping him on the back at the same time with pretty nearly all his power—“quite right. Didn’t I know you were the winning horse? —didn’t I tell you how it would be? Do you think I don’t know what gumption means? If I had not had my own weather-eye open, ay, and, d——, wide open, the most of my time, I shouldn’t have two or three thousand pounds to give away now to any young fellow that I take a fancy to.”

Alaric was, of course, all smiles and good-humour, and Gertrude not less so. The day after he heard of the engagement Uncle Bat went to town, and, on his return, he gave Gertrude £100 to buy her wedding clothes, and half that sum to her mother, in order that the thing might go off, as he expressed himself, “slip slap, and no mistake.” To Linda he gave nothing, but promised her that he would not forget her when her time came.

All this time Norman was at Norman's Grove; but there were three of the party who felt that it behoved them to let him know what was going on. Mrs. Woodward wrote first, and on the following day both Gertrude and Alaric wrote to him, the former from Hampton, and the latter from his office in London.

All these letters were much laboured, but, with all this labour, not one of them contained within it a grain of comfort. That from Mrs. Woodward came first and told the tale. Strange to say, though Harry had studiously rejected from his mind all idea of hope as regarded Gertrude, nevertheless the first tidings of her betrothal with Alaric struck him as though he had still fancied himself a favoured lover. He felt as though, in his absence, he had been robbed of a prize which was all his own; as though a chattel had been taken from him to which he had a full right; as though all the Hampton party, Mrs. Woodward included, were in a conspiracy to defraud him the moment his back was turned.

The blow was so severe that it laid him prostrate at once. He could not sob away his sorrow on his mother's bosom; no one could teach him how to bear his grief with meek

resignation. He had never spoken of his love to his friends at Norman's Grove. They had all been witnesses to his deep disappointment, but that had been attributed to his failure at his office. He was not a man to seek for sympathy in the sorrows of his heart. He had told Alaric of his rejection, because he had already told him of his love, but he had whispered no word of it to any one besides. On the day on which he received Mrs. Woodward's letter, he appeared at dinner ghastly pale, and evidently so ill as to be all but unable to sit at table: but he would say nothing to anybody; he sat brooding over his grief till he was unable to sit any longer.

And yet Mrs. Woodward had written with all her skill, with all her heart, striving to pluck the sting away from the tidings which she had to communicate. She had felt, however, that she owed as much, at least, to her daughter, as she did to him, and she failed to call Alaric perjured, false, dishonoured, unjust, disgraced, and treacherous. Nothing short of her doing so would have been deemed by Norman fitting mention of Tudor's sin; nothing else would have satisfied the fury of his wrath.

On the next morning he received Gertrude's

letter and Alaric's. The latter he never read—he opened it, saw that it began as usual, "My dear Harry," and then crammed it into his pocket. By return of post it went back under a blank cover, addressed to Alaric, at the Weights and Measures. The days of duelling were gone by—unfortunately, as Norman now thought—but nothing, he determined, should ever induce him again to hold friendly intercourse with the traitor. He abstained from making any such oath as to the Woodwards; but determined that his conduct in that respect should be governed by the manner in which Alaric was received by them.

But Gertrude's letter he read over and over again, and each time he did so he indulged in a fresh burst of hatred against the man who had deceived him. "A dishonest villain," he said to himself, over and over again; "what right had I to suppose he would be true to me when I found that he had been so false to others?"

"Dearest Harry," the letter began. Dearest Harry!—Why should she begin with a lie? He was not dearest. "You must not, must not, must not be angry with Alaric," she went on to say, as soon as she had told her tale. Oh, must he not? Not be angry with Alaric! Not angry with the man who had forgotten every law of

honour, every principle of honesty, every tie of friendship ! Not angry with the man whom he had trusted with the key of his treasure, and who had then robbed him ; who had stolen from him all his contentment, all his joy, his very heart's blood ;—not angry with him !

“ Our happiness will never be perfect unless you will consent to share it.” Thus, simply, in the affection of her heart, had Gertrude concluded the letter by which she intended to pour balm into the wounds of her rejected lover, and pave the way for the smoothing of such difficulties as might still lie in the way of her love.

“ Their happiness would not be perfect unless he would consent to share it !” Every word in the sentence was gall to him. It must have been written with the object of lacerating his wounds and torturing his spirit ; so at least said Norman to himself. He read the letter over and over again. At one time he resolved to keep it till he could thrust it back into her hand, and prove to her of what cruelty she had been guilty. Then he thought of sending it to Mrs. Woodward, and asking her how, after that, could she think that he should ever again enter her doors at Hampton. Finally, he tore it into a thousand bits, and threw them behind the fire.

“ Share their happiness !” and as he repeated the words he gave the last tear to the fragments of paper which he still held in his hand. Could he at that moment as easily have torn to shreds all hope of earthly joys for those two lovers, he would then have done it, and cast the ruins to the flames.

And yet Harry Norman was a religious man, a faithful believer, and, in some respects, more than a professing Christian. But it is so hard for us to bring home to our daily lives the precepts of which we so fully acknowledge the beauty and excellence ! “ Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” “ Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy !” Norman had read and pondered over these words, and determined that he would be meek and merciful, so that he might inherit the good things which God alone could give him. But where now was his meekness, and where his mercy ? “ If ye love them which love you, what reward have ye ? do not even the publicans the same ?” “ But I say unto you, love your enemies ; bless them that curse you, and do good to them that hate you and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.” He had now been spitefully used ; now was his time to prove that his pro-

fessions were worth more than those of publicans and sinners. Alas ! what publican, what sinner, could have shown more venom in his anger ? Oh ! what a lesson he might have learnt from Linda !

And yet what were his injuries to hers ! He in fact had not been injured, at least not by him against whom the strength of his wrath most fiercely raged. The two men had both admired Gertrude, but Norman had started on the race first. Before Alaric had had time to know his own mind, he had learnt that Norman claimed the beauty as his own. He had acknowledged to himself that Norman had a right to do so, and had scrupulously abstained from interfering with him. The course had been open for Norman ; he had made his effort without hindrance on Alaric's part, and had failed. Why should he now, like a dog in the manger, begrudge to his friend the fodder which he himself could not enjoy ! To him, at any rate, Alaric had in this been no traitor. 'Twas thus at least that Gertrude argued in her heart, and 'twas thus that Mrs. Woodward tried to argue also.

But who could excuse Alaric's *falsehood* to Linda ? And yet Linda had forgiven him.

CHAPTER XV.

NORMAN RETURNS TO TOWN.

HARRY NORMAN made no answer to either of his three letters beyond that of sending Alaric's back unread; but this, without other reply, was sufficient to let them all guess, nearly with accuracy, what was the state of his mind. Alaric told Gertrude how his missive had been treated, and Gertrude, of course, told her mother.

There was very little of that joy at Surbiton Cottage, which should have been the forerunner of a wedding. None of the Woodward circle were content thus to lose their friend. None of them could sit down easily under the reflection that all ties between them and their cousin were broken. And then their unhappiness on this score was augmented by hearing that Harry had sent up a medical certificate, instead of returning to his duties when his prolonged leave of absence was expired.

To Alaric this, at the moment, was a relief. He had dreaded the return of Norman to London. There were so many things to cause infinite pain to them both. All Norman's things, his books

and clothes, his desks and papers and pictures, his whips and sticks, and all those sundry belongings which even a bachelor collects around him, were strewing the rooms in which Alaric still lived. He had of course felt that it was impossible that they should ever again reside together. Not only must they quarrel, but all the men at their office must know that they had quarrelled. And yet some intercourse must be maintained between them ; they must daily meet in the rooms at the Weights and Measures ; and it would now in their altered position become necessary that in some things Norman should receive instructions from Alaric as his superior officer. But if Alaric thought of this often, so did Norman ; and before the last fortnight had expired the thinking of it had made him so ill, that his immediate return to London was out of the question. And so the evil day was put off for both of them.

Mrs. Woodward's heart melted within her, when she heard that Harry was really ill. She had gone on waiting day after day, for an answer to her letter, but no answer came. No answer came, but in lieu thereof she heard that Harry was laid up at Normansgrove. She heard it, and Gertrude heard it, and in spite of the com-

ing wedding there was very little joy at Surbiton Cottage.

And then Mrs. Woodward wrote again ; and a man must have had a heart of stone not to be moved by such a letter. She had “heard,” she said, “that he was ill, and the tidings had made her wretched. The more so inasmuch as he had sent no answer to her last letter. Was he very ill? was he dangerously ill? She hoped, she would fain hope, that his illness had not arisen from any mental grief. If he did not reply to this, or get some of his family to do so, there would be nothing for her but to go, herself, to Normansgrove. She could not remain quiet while she was left in such painful doubt about her dearest, well-loved Harry Norman.” How to speak of Gertrude, or how not to speak of her, Mrs. Woodward knew not—at last she added : “The three girls send their kindest love ; they are all as wretchedly anxious as I am. I know you are too good to wish that poor Gertrude should suffer ; but, if you did, you might have your wish. The tidings of your illness, together with your silence, have robbed her of all her happiness ;” and it ended thus :—“Dearest Harry ! do not be cruel to us ; our hearts are all with you.”

This was too much for Norman's sternness ; and he relented, at least as far as Mrs. Woodward was concerned. He wrote to say that though he was still weak, he was not dangerously ill ; and that he intended, if nothing occurred amiss, to be in town about the end of the year. He hoped he might then see her to thank her for all her kindness. She would understand that he could not go down to Surbiton Cottage ; but as she would doubtless have some occasion for coming up to town, they might thus contrive to meet. He then sent his love to Linda and Katie, and ended by saying that he had written to Charley Tudor to take lodgings for him. Not the slightest allusion was made either to Gertrude or Alaric, except that which might seem to be conveyed in the intimation that he could make no more visits to Hampton.

This letter was very cold. It just permitted Mrs. Woodward to know that Norman did not regard them all as strangers ; and that was all. Linda said it was very sad ; and Gertrude said, not to her mother but to Alaric, that it was heartless. Captain Cuttwater predicted that he would soon come round, and be as sound as a roach again in six months' time. Alaric said nothing ; but he went on with his wooing, and

this he did so successfully, as to make Gertrude painfully alive to what would have been, in her eyes, the inferiority of her lot, had she unfortunately allowed herself to become the victim of Norman's love.

Alaric went on with his wooing, and he also went on with his share-buying. Share-buying is very pretty fun when the markets run well, especially if one enjoy any little extra-ordinary means of knowing what is what. It was the exceeding prettiness of this fun which used to be so tempting in times gone by to our Chancellors of the Exchequer and their hangers-on, and which still maintains its temptations for some big wigs among our cordially adhesive allies.

Undy Scott had returned to town for a week or two to wind up the affairs of his expiring secretaryship, and he made Alaric understand that a nice thing might yet be done in Mary Janes. Alaric had been very foolish to sell so quickly; so at least said Undy. To this Alarie replied that he had bought the shares thoughtlessly, and had felt a desire to get rid of them as quickly as he could. Those were scruples at which Undy laughed pleasantly, and Alaric soon laughed with him.

"At any rate," said Undy, "your report is

written, and off your hands now : so you may do what you please in the matter, like a free man, with a safe conscience."

Alaric supposed that he might.

"I am as fond of the Civil Service as any man," said Undy ; "just as fond of it as Sir Gregory himself. I have been in it, and may be in it again. If I do, I shall do my duty. But I have no idea of having my hands tied. My purse is my own, to do what I like with it. Whether I buy beef or mutton, or shares in Cornwall, is nothing to any one. I give the Crown what it pays for, my five or six hours a day, and nothing more. When I was appointed private secretary to the First Lord of the Stannaries, I told my friend Whip Vigil that those were the terms on which I accepted office ; and Vigil agreed with me." Alaric, pupil as he was to the great Sir Gregory, declared that he also agreed with him. "That is not Sir Gregory's doctrine, but it's mine," said Undy ; "and though it's my own, I think it by far the honestest doctrine of the two."

Alaric did not sift the matter very deeply, nor ask Undy, or himself either, whether in using the contents of his purse in the purchase of shares he would be justified in turning to his own purpose any information which he might obtain in his

official career. Nor did he again offer to put that broad test to himself which he had before proposed, and ask himself whether he would dare to talk of what he was doing in the face of day, in his own office, before Sir Gregory, or before the Neverbends of the Service. He had already learnt the absurdity of such tests. Did other men talk of such doings? Was it not notorious that the world speculated, and that the world was generally silent in the matter? Why should he attempt to be wiser than those around him? was it not sufficient for him to be wise in his generation? What man had ever become great, who allowed himself to be impeded by small scruples? If the sportsman returned from the field laden with game, who would scrutinize the mud on his gaiters? ‘Excelsior!’ said Alaric to himself with a proud ambition; and so he attempted to rise by the purchase and sale of mining shares.

When he was fairly engaged in the sport, his style of play so fascinated Undy that they embarked in a sort of partnership, *pro hac vice*, good to last during the ups and downs of Wheal Mary Jane. Mary Jane, no doubt, would soon run dry, or else be drowned, as had happened to New Friendship. But in the mean time something might be done.

"Of course you'll be consulted about those other papers," said Undy. "It might be as well they should be kept back for a week or two."

"Well, I'll see," said Alaric; and as he said it, he felt that his face was tinged with a blush of shame. But what then? who would look at the dirt on his gaiters, if he filled his bag with game?

Mrs. Woodward was no whit angered by the coldness of Norman's letter. She wished that he could have brought himself to write in a different style, but she remembered his grief, and knew that as time should work its cure upon it, he would come round and again be gentle and affectionate, at any rate with her.

She misdoubted Charley's judgment in the choice of lodgings, and therefore she talked over the matter with Alaric. It was at last decided that he, Alaric, should move instead of driving Norman away. His final movement would now soon take place; that movement which would rob him of the freedom of lodgingshood and invest him with all the ponderous responsibility and close restraint of a householder. He and Gertrude were to be married in February, and after spending a cold honeymoon in Paris and Brussels, were to begin their married life amidst the sharp winds of a London March. But love,

gratified love, will, we believe, keep out even an English east wind. If so, it is certainly the only thing that will.

Charley, therefore, wrote to Norman, telling him that he could remain in his old home, and humbly asking permission to remain there with him. To this request he received a kind rejoinder in the affirmative. Though Charley was related to Alaric, there had always apparently been a closer friendship between him and Norman than between the two cousins; and now, in his fierce unbridled quarrel with Alaric, and in his present coolness with the Woodwards, he seemed to turn to Charley with more than ordinary affection.

And so the time for Norman's return was at hand. Christmas had passed at the Cottage with some attempt at the usual Christmas jollifications. But the Surbiton jollifications had this year failed of being jolly; beef, indeed, there was there, as usual, and pudding; a turkey also, and mince-pies; but beef and turkey, garnished though they were with holly, and pudding and pies all rich and rare, the mistletoe even, and the big bowl full of steaming punch brewed with excellent care by Uncle Bat's own hand,—even these things did not suffice. For five years pre-

viously Harry Norman had been there, and now Harry Norman was to some of them an enemy, and to others hardly a friend,

Norman made his appearance at the office on the first Monday of the new year. He had hitherto sat at the same desk with Alaric, each of them occupying one side of it; on his return he found himself opposite to a stranger. Alaric had, of course, been promoted to a room of his own.

The Weights and Measures had never been a noisy office; but now it became more silent than ever. Men there talked but little at any time, and now they seemed to cease from talking altogether. It was known to all that the Damon and Pythias of the establishment were Damon and Pythias no longer; that war raged between them, and that if all accounts were true, they were ready to fly, each at the other's throat. Some attributed this to the competitive examination; others said it was love; others declared that it was money, the root of evil; and one rash young gentleman stated his positive knowledge that it was all three. At any rate something dreadful was expected; and men sat anxious at their desks, fearing the coming evil.

On the Monday the two men did not meet, nor on the Tuesday. On the next morning

Alaric, having acknowledged to himself the necessity of breaking the ice, walked into the room where Norman sat with three or four others. It was absolutely necessary that he should make some arrangement with him as to a certain branch of office work; and though it was competent for him, as the superior, to have sent for Norman as the inferior, he thought it best to abstain from doing so, even though he were thereby obliged to face his enemy, for the first time, in the presence of others.

"Well, Mr. Embryo," said he, speaking to the new junior, and standing with his back to the fire in an easy way, as though there was nothing wrong under the sun, or at least nothing at the Weights and Measures, "Well, Mr. Embryo, how do you get on with those calculations?"

"Pretty well, I believe, sir; I think I begin to understand them now," said the tyro, producing for Alaric's gratification five or six folio sheets covered with intricate masses of figures.

"Ah! yes; that will do very well," said Alaric, taking up one of the sheets and looking at it with an assumed air of great interest. Though he acted his part pretty well, his mind was very far removed from Mr. Embryo's efforts.

Norman sat at his desk, as black as a thunder

cloud, with his eyes turned intently at the paper before him ; but so agitated that he could not even pretend to write.

“ By the bye, Norman,” said Alaric, “ when will it suit you to look through those Scotch papers with me ? ”

“ My name, sir, is Mr. Norman,” said Harry, getting up and standing by his chair with all the firmness of a Paladin of old.

“ With all my heart,” said Alaric. “ In speaking to you I can have but one wish, and that is to do so in any way that may best please you.”

“ Any instructions you may have to give I will attend to, as far as my duty goes,” said Norman.

And then Alaric, pushing Mr. Embryo from his chair without much ceremony, sat down opposite to his former friend, and said and did what he had to say and do with an easy unaffected air, in which there was, at any rate, none of the usual superciliousness of a neophyte’s authority. Norman was too agitated to speak reasonably, or to listen calmly, but Alaric knew that though he might not do so to-day, he would to-morrow, or if not to-morrow, the next day ; and so from day to day he came into Norman’s room and trans-

acted his business. Mr. Embryo got accustomed to looking through the window at the Council Office for the ten minutes that he remained there, and Norman also became reconciled to the custom. And thus, though they never met in any other way, they daily had a kind of intercourse with each other, which, at last, contrived to get itself arranged into a certain amount of civility on both sides.

Immediately that Norman's arrival was heard of at Surbiton Cottage, Mrs. Woodward hastened up to town to see him. She wrote to him to say that she would be at his lodgings at a certain hour, and begged him to come thither to her. Of course he did not refuse, and so they met. Mrs. Woodward had much doubted whether or no she would take Linda or Katie with her, but at last she resolved to go alone. Harry, she thought, would be more willing to speak freely to her, to open his heart to her, if there were nobody by but herself.

Their meeting was very touching, and characteristic of the two persons. Mrs. Woodward was sad enough, but her sadness was accompanied by a strength of affection that carried before it every obstacle. Norman was also sad; but he was at first stern and cold, and would have remained so

to the last, had not his manly anger been over-powered by her feminine tenderness.

It was singular, but not the less true, that at this period Norman appeared to have forgotten altogether that he had ever proposed to Gertrude, and been rejected by her. All that he said and all that he thought was exactly what he might have said and thought had Alaric not taken from him his affianced bride. No suitor had ever felt his suit to be more hopeless than he had done; and yet he now regarded himself as one whose high hopes of happy love had all been destroyed by the treachery of a friend and the fickleness of a woman.

This made the task of appeasing him very difficult to Mrs. Woodward. She could not in plain language remind him that he had been plainly rejected; nor could she, on the other hand, permit her daughter to be branded with a fault of which she had never been guilty.

Mrs. Woodward had wished, though she had hardly hoped, so to mollify Norman as to induce him to promise to be at the wedding; but she soon found that this was out of the question. There was no mitigating his anger against Alaric.

“Mrs. Woodward,” said he, standing very up-

right, and looking very stiff ; “ I will never again willingly put myself in any position where I must meet him.”

“ Oh ! Harry, don’t say so—think of your close friendship, think of your long friendship.”

“ Why did he not think of it ?”

“ But, Harry—if not for his sake, if not for your own, at any rate do so for ours ; for my sake, for Katie’s and Linda’s, for Gertrude’s sake.”

“ I had rather not speak of Gertrude, Mrs. Woodward.”

“ Ah ! Harry, Gertrude has done you no injury ; why should you thus turn your heart against her ? You should not blame her ; if you have any one to blame, it is me.”

“ No ; you have been true to me.”

“ And has she been false ? Oh ! Harry, think how we have loved you ! You should be more just to us.”

“ Tush !” he said. “ I do not believe in justice ; there is no justice left. I would have given everything I had for him. I would have made any sacrifice. His happiness was as much my thought as my own. And now—— and yet you talk to me of justice.”

“ And if he had injured you, Harry, would you not forgive him ? Do you repeat your prayers

without thinking of them ? Do you not wish to forgive them that trespass against you ? ” Norman groaned inwardly in the spirit. “ Do you not think of this when you kneel every night before your God ? ”

“ There are injuries which a man cannot forgive, is not expected to forgive.”

“ Are there, Harry ? Oh ! that is a dangerous doctrine. In that way every man might nurse his own wrath till anger would make devils of us all. Our Saviour has made no exceptions.”

“ In one sense, I do forgive him, Mrs. Woodward. I wish him no evil. But it is impossible that I should call a man who has so injured me my friend. I look upon him as disgraced for ever.”

She then endeavoured to persuade him to see Gertrude, or at any rate to send his love to her. But in this also he was obdurate. “ It could,” he said, “ do no good.” He could not answer for himself that his feelings would not betray him. A message would be of no use ; if true, it would not be gracious ; if false, it had better be avoided. He was quite sure Gertrude would be indifferent as to any message from him. The best thing for them both would be that they should forget each other.

He promised, however, that he would go down to Hampton immediately after the marriage, and he sent his kindest love to Linda and Katie. "And, dear Mrs. Woodward," said he, "I know you think me very harsh, I know you think me vindictive—but pray, pray believe that I understand all your love, and acknowledge all your goodness. The time will, perhaps, come when we shall be as happy together as we once were."

Mrs. Woodward, trying to smile through her tears, could only say that she would pray that that time might soon come; and so, bidding God bless him, as a mother might bless her child, she left him and returned to Hampton, not with a light heart.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FIRST WEDDING.

IN spite, however, of Norman and his anger, on a cold snowy morning in the month of February, Gertrude stood at the altar in Hampton Church, a happy trusting bride, and Linda stood smiling behind her, the lovely leader of the nuptial train. Nor were Linda's smiles false or forced, much less treacherous. She had taught herself to look on Alaric as her sister's husband, and though in doing so she had suffered, and did still suffer, she now thought of her own lost lover in no other guise.

A housemaid, not long since, who was known in the family in which she lived to be affianced to a neighbouring gardener, came weeping to her mistress.

“ Oh, ma'am !”

“ Why, Susan, what ails you ?”

“ Oh, ma'am !”

“ Well, Susan—what is it ?—why are you crying ?”

“ Oh, ma’am—John !”

“ Well—what of John ? I hope he is not misbehaving.”

“ Indeed, ma’am, he is then ; the worst of misbehaviour ; for he’s gone and got hisself married.” And poor Susan gave vent to a flood of tears, which, under such circumstances, was not unnatural.

Her mistress tried to comfort her, and not in vain. She told her that probably she might be better as she was ; that John, seeing what he had done, must be a false creature, who would undoubtedly have used her ill ; and she ended her good counsel by trying to make Susan understand that there were still as good fish in the sea, as had ever yet been caught out of it.

“ And that’s true too, ma’am,” said Susan, with her apron to her eyes.

“ Then you should not be downhearted, you know.”

“ Nor I han’t down’arted ma’am, for thank God I could love any man ; but it’s the looks on it, ma’am ; it’s that I mind.”

How many of us are there, women and men too, who think most of the ‘looks of it’ under such circumstances ; and who, were we as honest as poor Susan, ought to thank God, as she did,

that we can love any one ; any one that is of the other sex. We are not all of us susceptible of being torn to tatters by an unhappy passion ; not even all those of us who may be susceptible of a true and honest love. And it is well that it is so. It is one of God's mercies ; and if we were as wise as Susan, we should thank God for it.

Linda was, perhaps, one of those. She was good, affectionate, tender, and true. But she was made of that stuff which can bend to the north wind. The world was not all over with her because a man had been untrue to her. She had had her grief, and had been told to meet it like a Christian ; she had been obedient to the telling, and now felt the good result. So when Gertrude was married she stood smiling behind her ; and when her new brother-in-law kissed her in the vestry-room she smiled again, and honestly wished them happiness.

And Katie was there, very pretty and bonny, still childish, with her short dress and long trowsers, but looking as though she, too, would soon feel the strength of her own wings, and be able to fly away from her mother's nest. Dear Katie ! Her story has yet to be told. To her belongs neither the soft easiness of her sister

Linda nor the sterner dignity of Gertrude. But she has a character of her own which contains, perhaps, higher qualities than those given to either of her sisters.

And there were other bridesmaids there ; how many it boots not now to say. We must have the spaces round our altars greatly widened if this passion for bevies of attendant nymphs be allowed to go on increasing—and if crinoline increase also. If every bride is to have twelve maidens, and each maiden to stand on no less than a twelve-yard circle, what modest temple will ever suffice for a sacrifice to Hymen ?

And Mrs. Woodward was there, of course ; as pretty to my thinking as either of her daughters, or any of the bridesmaids. She was very pretty and smiling and quiet. But when Gertrude said “ I will,” she was thinking of Harry Norman, and grieving that he was not there.

And Captain Cuttwater was there, radiant in a new blue coat, made special for the occasion, and elastic with true joy. He had been very generous. He had given a thousand pounds to Alaric, and settled £150 a year on Gertrude, payable, of course, after his death. This, indeed, was the bulk of what he had to give, and Mrs. Woodward had seen with regret his exuberant

munificence to one of her children. But Gertrude was her child, and of course she could not complain.

And Charley was there, acting as best man. It was just the place and just the work for Charley. He forgot all his difficulties, all his duns, and also all his town delights. Without a sigh he left his lady in Norfolk Street to mix gin sling for other admirers, and felt no regret though four brother navvies were going to make a stunning night of it at the "Salon de Seville dansant," at the bottom of Holborn Hill. However, he had his hopes that he might be back in time for some of that fun.

And Undy Scott was there. He and Alaric had fraternized so greatly of late that the latter had, as a matter of course, asked him to his wedding, and Mrs. Woodward had of course expressed her delight at receiving Alaric's friend. Undy also was a pleasant fellow for a wedding party ; he was full of talk, fond of ladies, being no whit abashed in his attendance on them by the remembrance of his bosom's mistress, whom he had left, let us hope, happy, in her far domestic retirement. Undy Scott was a good man at a wedding, and made himself specially agreeable on this occasion.

But the great glory of the day was the presence of Sir Gregory Hardlines. It was a high honour, considering all that rested on Sir Gregory's shoulders, for so great a man to come all the way down to Hampton to see a clerk in the Weights and Measures married.

'Cum tot sustineas, et tanta negotia solus,'

—for we may call it ‘solus,’ Sir Warwick and Mr. Jobbles being sources of more plague than profit in carrying out your noble schemes;—while so many things are on your shoulders, Sir Gregory; while you are defending the Civil Service by your pen [?], adorning it by your conduct, perfecting it by new rules,—how could any man have had the face to ask you to a wedding?

Nevertheless Sir Gregory was there, and did not lose the excellent opportunity which a speech at the breakfast table afforded him for expressing his opinion on the Civil Service of his country.

And so Gertrude Woodward became Gertrude Tudor, and she and Alaric were whirled away by a post-chaise and post-boy, done out with white bows, to the Hampton-Court station; from thence they whisked up to London, and then down to Dover; and there we will leave them.

They were whisked away, having first duly gone through the amount of badgering which

the bride and bridegroom have to suffer at the wedding breakfast table. They drank their own health in champagne. Alaric made a speech, in which he said he was quite unworthy of his present happiness, and Gertrude picked up all the bijous, gold pencil-cases, and silver cream-jugs, which were thrown at her from all sides. All the men made speeches, and all the women laughed, but the speech of the day was that celebrated one made by Sir Gregory, in which he gave a sketch of Alaric Tudor as the beau ideal of a clerk in the Civil Service. "His heart," said he, energetically, "is at the Weights and Measures;" but Gertrude looked at him as though she did not believe a word of it.

And so Alaric and Gertrude were whisked away, and the wedding guests were left to look sheepish at each other, and take themselves off as best they might. Sir Gregory, of course, had important public business which precluded him from having the gratification of prolonging his stay at Hampton. Charley got away in perfect time to enjoy whatever there might be to be enjoyed at the dancing saloon of Seville, and Undy Scott returned to his club.

Then all was again quiet at Surbiton Cottage. Captain Cuttwater, who had perhaps drank the

bride's health once too often, went to sleep ; Katie, having taken off her fine clothes, roamed about the house disconsolate, and Mrs. Woodward and Linda betook themselves to their needles.

There is something extremely oppressive to the spirits in the dulness which follows any enforced and fleeting excitement. The mind cannot revert at once to its ordinary tone, nor the body to its ordinary pursuits. Who that has been left alone after the departure of friends, who that has completed a task, and has left himself without another task to fill its place, but has felt this ?

This was felt at Surbiton Cottage, not only on the day of the wedding, but for a long period subsequently. It was not only that the bride and bridegroom were gone, that the champagne was all drank, and the finery all put away, but that the whole tenor of their life was changed, and all its interest at an end.

The Woodwards foolishly enough had taught themselves to look forward, during the week, to the coming of the Saturday evening, when their circle was increased and their feminine monotony relieved, by the arrival of their friends from London ; till now, left without Harry Norman and Alaric Tudor, they were dull enough.

The Tudors went to Brussels, and were made welcome by the Belgian banker, whose counters he had deserted so much to his own benefit, and from thence to Paris, and, having been there long enough to buy a French bonnet and wonder at the enormity of French prices, they returned to a small but comfortable house they had prepared for themselves in the neighbourhood of Westbourne Terrace.

Previous to this Norman had been once, and but once, at Hampton, and, when there, he had failed in being comfortable himself, or in making the Woodwards so ; he could not revert to his old habits, or sit, or move, or walk, as though nothing special had happened since he had been last there. He could not talk about Gertrude, and he could not help talking of her. By some closer packing among the ladies a room had now been prepared for him in the house ; even this upset him, and brought to his mind all those unpleasant thoughts which he should have endeavoured to avoid.

He did not repeat his visit before the Tudors returned ; and then for some time he was prevented from doing so by the movements of the Woodwards themselves. Mrs. Woodward paid a visit to her married daughter, and, when she returned, Linda did the same. And so for a while

Norman was, as it were, divided from his old friends, whereas Tudor, as a matter of course, was one of themselves.

It was only natural that Mrs. Woodward should forgive Alaric and receive him to her bosom, now that he was her son-in-law. After all, such ties as these avail more than any pre-dilections, more than any effort of judgment in the choice of the objects of our affections. We associate with those with whom the tenor of life has thrown us, and from habit we learn to love those with whom we are brought to associate.

In this way Mrs. Woodward was reconciled to Alaric, and the family, for a while, went on quietly, with mutual good-will to each other.

END OF VOL. I.



